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ABSTRACT

Educational reform poses problems for administrators in rural areas who have limited time and resources. This guide offers a process that can be used by rural administrators to engage the community in activities that will enhance children's success in the classroom and in their adult lives. Section 1 discusses the importance of community engagement. Section 2 describes 11 key steps of the process in 4 phases and emphasizes the importance of celebration, team building, and maintaining two-way communications. Phase 1, getting organized, consists of three steps: committing, establishing a team, and selecting co-facilitators. Steps in phase 2, studying the situation, are mapping community assets and collecting and analyzing the data. Phase 3, taking responsive action, is composed of three steps: articulating a vision and goals, developing action plans, and implementing action plans. Phase 4, evaluating and reporting results, contains three steps: monitoring progress, evaluating and reporting on the impact of the action plan, and monitoring and refining the action plan. Section 3 discusses how research and best practice help shape school-community action plans. Section 4 contains 65 references and short descriptions and contact information for 20 organizations and 10 regional educational laboratories that can be used as resources. Ten appendices present research findings about community engagement, dealing with change and disagreements, and provide inventories, checklists, and other planning materials for use in the community engagement process. (TD)

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Joining Forces: Engaging with Community to Improve Rural Student Achievement

Community Engagement Guide

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The Rural Education Specialty at AEL serves as the organizational home for those aspects of AEL's work that involve providing R&D-based services to rural schools and communities. This includes the Rural Laboratory Network Program for the nation's system of 10 Regional Educational Laboratories. The mission of the Rural Education Specialty is to promote the integrity of rural, small schools in a global economy. Its guiding focus is to foster the essential relationship between rural schools and their communities.

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This process for engaging communities to enhance students' academic achievement grew out of AEL's 1998 experiences with the National Science Foundation's Appalachian Rural Systemic Initiative (ARSI) for math and science education. Along with the Appalachian Regional Commission, AEL and ARSI conducted and refined research-based initiatives in community engagement under the auspices of the Kentucky Science and Technology Council. AEL is grateful to the community engagement teams at the ARSI catalyst schools who suggested improvements to the process. AEL also acknowledges the Appalachian Regional Commission and Wimberly Royster and Keith Smith of ARSI for their work in the collaborative effort. We are also grateful for the efforts of ARSI community engagement coordinator Ben Dickens, consultant Doug Fleming, AEL editor Stan Bumgardner, AEL evaluator Greg Leopold, Pam Buckley and staff at the Eisenhower Regional Consortium for Mathematics and Science Education at AEL, members of the ARSI Management Team and Advisory Council, and AEL Rural Center secretary Penny Sebok.

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How To Use This Guide

Joining Forces: Engaging with Community to Improve Rural Student Achievement is intended primarily for school administrators (especially principals and superintendents) but also can be used by community members. It is crucial for school administrators to take the lead in committing to the process of community engagement for improving academic achievement. Community members, however, may need to build a process in order to engage school administrators in discussions about school improvement. As citizens, this is their right and responsibility. No matter who uses this guide, it is our fervent hope that it will be used as an instrument for positive change that will benefit students and their communities.

This guide is not intended to dictate a hard-and-fast process for community engagement for academic achievement. It is not a cookbook. In fact, it is intended to be flexible, because each community is different. The guide describes 11 key steps of the process, and emphasizes the importance of celebration and team building and maintaining two-way communications. It allows users to pick and choose among activities to develop their own approach to community engagement that will enhance academic achievement. Here are the 11 steps outlined in this guide.

ALL PHASES: *Celebration and Team Building*
ALL PHASES: *Maintaining Two-Way Communications*

PHASE I: *Getting Organized*
1. Commit
2. Establish a Team
3. Select Co-facilitators

PHASE II: *Studying the Situation*
4. Map Community Assets
5. Collect and Analyze the Data

PHASE III: *Taking Responsive Action*
6. Articulate A Vision and Goals
7. Develop Action Plans
8. Implement Action Plans

PHASE IV: *Evaluating and Reporting Results*
9. Monitor Progress
10. Evaluate and Report on the Impact of Your Action Plan
11. Monitor and Refine the Action Plan

These steps offer a framework for a school-community engagement process that can enhance student academic achievement. These steps represent what we believe to be the essentials of school-community engagement. You may identify other steps along the way.

The steps we suggest are intended to provide considerable latitude for communities to build a school-community engagement process that meets local needs.

Suggested activities accompany the description of each step along the way. The activities are intended to help you think about how to build and use knowledge about your school and community. These activities can be modified, or you may wish to make up your own activities. In addition, we have included a list of resources that you may wish to consult; many of these resources suggest other activities.

We offer these principles for success:

1. Do not launch a community engagement effort until you have laid the proper groundwork. The "Community Engagement Readiness Inventory" mentioned at the end of Section 1 can help you gauge the readiness of your school.
2. Make sure your community engagement process includes a broad base of community members.
3. Build trust based on two-way communications and collaboration.
4. Get to know your community's assets.
5. Be aware of negatives, but don't dwell on them.
6. Keep student achievement first.
7. Plan, plan, plan.
8. Keep projects simple, at least at the beginning.
9. Build on your successes.
10. Learn from your mistakes.
11. Be creative.
12. Have fun.

Section One

Why Is Community Engagement Important?

Section One
Why Is Community Engagement Important?

Reform in public schools is nothing new. But the past 15 or so years have seen perhaps the most widespread changes ever as states have scrutinized their education systems in response to pressures from the federal government, lawsuits, businesses, nonprofit organizations, and citizens. Another pressure for reform comes from the constantly changing global economy, with the rise of high-speed information technology and the ability of firms to move jobs around the world easily. While education reform legislation varies from state to state, accountability and higher student achievement are common elements. There is no question that rural schools have felt these demands for change.

Some rural administrators and teachers may see demands for increased accountability and student achievement as yet another set of obstacles for school employees who do an often thankless job. Reform poses problems for overworked administrators and teachers in rural areas who are constantly plagued by limits of time and resources and who may sometimes feel isolated from their communities. Yet, there is an extremely positive aspect to the notions of accountability and student achievement. Accountability offers administrators and teachers an opportunity to reaffirm the importance of the public school, a place to engage the community in discussions that reaffirm the importance of the public school built around expectations of high student achievement. Accountability may be seen as a way to expand the school's resources by letting stakeholders who want better schools become directly involved in activities that will help increase student achievement.

Family, community, and schools are the three "pillars" of education. From them, public schooling draws its strength, received its mission, and developed its unique character as an institution in our society. The three have formed a partnership over the years, resembling at its best moments a reciprocal giving-getting compact. Schools prepare our children to assume their place within communities as productive workers and responsible, able citizens. Historically, schools have transmitted the cultural values that undergird our family structure and unify our society. In turn, families and communities have supplied the financial, moral, and practical support our schools rely upon to fulfill their mission.

The mission of public schools is under challenge, however. We now find ourselves in the midst of widespread crises that have weakened public schools. Distinct but related social, economic, and cultural upheavals have changed the face of our communities, undermined the structure of our families, and unraveled the fabric of our society. In their wake the schools have been left struggling to carry out a mission whose methods and goals are no longer clear, and whose feasibility is in question. With the weakening of the traditional partners in public education, the compact among schools, community, and family must be rebuilt (Decker & Decker, 1994).

The challenge is how to rebuild the educational partnership so that rural families and communities can reassert their legitimate interests in schools and become constructively involved in educating children for academic success. This guide is intended to help school

administrators meet that challenge. It offers a research-tested process that school administrators and teachers can use to engage the community in activities that will enhance children's chances for success in the classroom and in their adult lives. (See Appendix A for a brief literature review of research on community engagement.) A successful transition to adulthood is the essence of student achievement. This guide is designed for rural communities, where the ideals of small classes, personalized instruction, strong relationships, cooperative learning, parent and community involvement—a focus on the whole child-still persist and are valued.

What Is "Rural?"

Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary defines *rural* as "relating to the country, country people or life, or agriculture." This seems a simple definition on the face of it. In reality, *rural* is a complicated term because rural areas are so diverse. The notion of *rural* entails cultural, economic, political, and philosophical questions that are neither easy to ask nor easy to answer. Rural economies are involved in producing agricultural commodities, harvesting timber, extracting mineral wealth, and providing outdoor recreation, services, and manufacturing products. Rural areas may have relatively high poverty rates, low incomes, and limited job opportunities. Then again, they may be relatively healthy. *Rural* connotes a geographic reality of open spaces, relatively sparse population, and distance from the city that often makes these areas seem peripheral, on the margins of society. Rural places face the demographic reality of aging populations, yet births may exceed deaths. There may be a loss of population and vital services and businesses in many areas. But some rural areas are gaining population. Rural places may be the homes of landowners, business people, workers who toil in fields or factories, and migrants who spend part of the year in the community. There may be different races or ethnic groups living in the community. The word *rural* can also represent an idea—a series of beliefs about a way of life often idealized as superior to city life, based on love of the land and sense of community. Given all of these confusing and sometimes contradictory descriptions of *rural* places, here are some "typical" characteristics:

- persistent poverty, concentrated in geographic clusters of counties across the country, usually with distinctive racial or ethnic character
- relatively remote from urban centers
- limited job opportunities
- participation in resource extraction (agriculture, forestry, fishing, mining)
- greater number of births than deaths in many counties
- people feeling adverse effects of global economic changes
- out-migration of people and institutions

It is all too easy to look at the many problems of rural areas and become pessimistic. This is a trap. With hard work and creativity, problems can be circumvented, overcome, or even turned into assets. Many rural communities remain wellspring with tremendous potential because of the enduring importance of community and the diverse talents of their residents. Local schools remain as one of the community's crucial institutions with

tremendous resources. Rural schools, however, are under tremendous pressures to reform; their futures may be in jeopardy if they can't meet state-imposed academic standards. If the school is phased out, the community will suffer a disastrous blow. In short, schools and communities need each other to survive. One of the best paths to survival is to build school and community support to ensure that all students achieve to the best of their abilities.

What Is "Community?"

Like *rural*, *community* is an elusive term. It is often something that is in our hearts, something we long for. It may be something determined by political or geographic boundaries. We may belong to a number of different communities at the same time, such as the neighborhood in which we reside, the church we attend, or the city or town where we work and do business. We often refer to the school as a community. Turning again to *Marum-Webster* dictionary, we find that *community* is defined in numerous ways, including a unified body of individuals, such as people with common interests living in a particular area, or a group of people with a common history or common social, economic, and political interests. In the process outlined in this guide, the school becomes a central focus of the community. But the community is larger than the school grounds. It includes parents, students, business and community leaders, taxpayers, and any other stakeholders who have an interest in students' academic achievement.

What is Community Engagement?

Community engagement marshals the energy, talent, and commitment of families (parents and students), business leaders, taxpayers, and others to create an atmosphere conducive to high levels of student achievement in the school and the community. It is based on a conscious decision by school officials to directly involve community members in activities that will help create this atmosphere. It builds stakeholder support for the school. It may well help the school and the larger community enhance their futures by building on the talents of residents.

Many schools already have community involvement. Parents and community members help with duplicating papers, preparing treats for parties, working as athletic boosters, acting as band parents, and the like. In the case of community involvement, community members tend to follow the instructions of administrators and teachers, filling an important helping role. Communication tends to be from the top down, although suggestions may be welcome in certain cases. School involvement is coordinated by school officials to fill school needs.

Community engagement requires school administrators to think in new and different ways. It requires *two-way* communication. School administrators provide leadership, but they must also cultivate leadership *in the community*, outside the walls of the school. It requires coordinating talents and skills of community members and school staff to work together to

build higher student performance in the school, with the long-run goal of making the community a better place to live. Community engagement means listening to citizens' concerns about schools in new ways and developing partnerships to deal with those concerns, while building the trust necessary to engage in reforms designed to increase student achievement. In today's jargon, this means "thinking outside the box."

Why Engage the Community?

To many administrators and teachers, the idea of giving power to people outside the existing lines of authority is at least frightening, and may seem insane. Before passing judgment on the idea, however, maybe it would be a good idea to answer a few basic questions: Is your school having a tough time communicating its message to parents and other citizens in the community? Does it often seem like people just don't understand what's going on in the school? Does it seem like the school is under attack for no reason at all? In short, are traditional methods of communicating with the public working effectively in terms of enhancing student achievement? Maybe it's time to consider new ways to build a relationship between the school and the community.

The notion of community engagement for academic achievement is based on the belief that a good rural school is both served by and provides service to its community. In other words, the school plays an important role in developing the community, and the community plays an important role in developing the school. Both the school and the community benefit from mutual interaction, with widespread public participation for collaborative planning and action. Such an arrangement offers many potential benefits:

The school might benefit in these areas:

- establishing expectations across the community for high levels of academic performance for all students
- developing a more rigorous and relevant curriculum and teaching practices that allow students to learn challenging subject matter through real-life roles and situations
- developing a curriculum that emphasizes reasoning, problem solving, and understanding over simply memorizing facts, terms, and formulas
- creating opportunities for students to learn in, from, with, about, and for their own communities through interactions with community members and local resources
- creating systems for measuring and reporting student progress to parents and other taxpayers
- finding better ways of using time, people, space, and other resources in meeting students' needs
- increasing use of communications technologies as tools for collecting, organizing, displaying, exchanging and analyzing data in the classroom and in administration
- creating an atmosphere to recruit and support teachers who have a deep understanding of both the subject matter and the learning processes that actively engage students
- increasing the school's resources to help meet its mission of serving students

The community might benefit in these areas:

- building new knowledge about the school and its programs
- building knowledge about the community and its resources
- gathering people from the community with common interests
- increasing citizens' on-the-job and civic skills
- involving citizens in creating a vision for and meeting the goals of a community-based school
- pooling school and community resources to improve community life
- developing new leadership in the community
- strengthening the resilience of both the school and the community in times of change

Now, we reach the point where school officials might want to consider moving "outside the box" by opening doors to the school's stakeholders. Setting up new relationships won't happen overnight, but here are some probable outcomes of a concerted effort to engage the community:

- community members have a say in strengthening school academic programs by participating in a variety of voluntary, planned initiatives
- students and teachers interact with community members to develop new school resources and complement existing ones, building the knowledge, skills, tools, and attitudes necessary for student academic success, civic responsibility, and a successful transition into the workforce
- there are new educational partnerships among schools, businesses, churches, agencies, and individuals with skills that assist the school's work
- the school becomes a player in assisting with economic and community development
- students and community members have increased awareness of and pride in local institutions, resources, traditions, and values

What Are Some Obstacles to Community Engagement?

Community engagement is no easy task. There appear to be many obstacles that may be present in varying degrees in different rural communities. In Table 1, the obstacles are divided into four categories: (1) systemic obstacles within the school system, (2) systemic obstacles outside the school system, (3) personal obstacles of school staff, and (4) personal obstacles of citizens. Systemic obstacles are flaws (perceived and real) that are related to the organization of the school or the larger society. They may be difficult or impossible to change, especially if they are legal obstacles. Personal obstacles are a different matter. They are under the control of individuals, and may be easier to change than systemic obstacles, if the individuals involved are willing to change.

Often, school officials can deal directly with school system and personal obstacles related to administration, faculty, and staff. But they can only mitigate the effects of systemic obstacles outside the school system and personal obstacles related to parents and other

citizens. If the factors outside of the school are significant in a particular locality, then administrators will be in a difficult but tenable position. This table illustrates how the school's problems are the community's problems, and how the community's problems are the school's problems. It suggests how important it is for school officials to interact within the community to overcome obstacles to community engagement.

Table 1
Real and Perceived Obstacles to Community Engagement

Systemic

Inside school system	**Outside school system**
Intimidating, complex system	High poverty levels
Bureaucratic control of information, ownership of planning processes	Lack of employment opportunities/Loss of students once educated through out-migration
School politics	High illiteracy rates
Clashing values	No education tradition or clear agreement on it
Social diversity a challenge	Low education levels
Economy of "one best way" of doing tasks	Racial, ethnic stereotypes
Economy and politics of inertia, *status quo*	Rural/neighborhood geography, distance
Scarcity of resources	Scarcity of resources
Pressures of standards, accountability	Lack of business/community support

Personal

School staff	**Citizens**
Blocks participation	Don't value education
Professional distance	Bad experiences in school
Professional vocabulary	Intimidated by staff, size of building
Fear of empowered parents	Don't feel ownership
Fear of data manipulation (math anxiety)	Don't understand data (math anxiety)
Fear of what data will tell public	Rumors, misinformation
Fear of change	Fear of change
Too many responsibilities already	Too busy with work, other family obligations
Lack of expertise in working with public	Lack of technical expertise
Fear of disagreements	Fear of disagreements, challenging people in power
	Student resistance (mainly high school)

Adapted from Collins (1998)

Many obstacles outside the school system can be overcome if school officials are willing to engage community members in dealing with community issues. School administrators must be willing to take the first and necessary steps by committing to continuous improvement of two-way coordination of communications and collaboration between the school and all stakeholders. This is no panacea; there will still be politics. The

key is to channel political wrangling toward positive ends by focusing first on the academic achievement of students and then on the needs of the school and larger community. As communication lines are established with various people and groups in the community, it is crucial to foster trust and to then continue to build that trust. Because school officials hold the reins of power and finances, they have to be the ones to take the first steps. This is not easy, because school officials may well fear losing their power. It is important to overcome this fear and stop viewing parents and other stakeholders as adversaries or as mere bystanders who are ignorant of what goes on in schools. One approach to overcoming this fear is to consider the possibility that power sharing can actually enhance the power of school officials by broadening their base of support in the community.

As the community engagement process gets rolling, initial conversations between schools and parents and other community members may not focus directly on student achievement. Instead, conversations may revolve around other issues, such as traffic, school safety, discipline, and the like. This is all right. These issues offer a starting point for improving relationships and building trust between the school and the community. If school officials handle these conversations by listening to community members' concerns and addressing the problems raised collaboratively, they will build a foundation of openness and trust that is essential to later discussions about student achievement. School officials cannot talk down to parents and must soften the professionalism of attitude and vocabulary that creates distance and suspicion. See Appendix B for a discussion of resistance to change, sources of disagreements, and reaching consensus.

Is the School Ready for Community Engagement?

Appendix C contains an inventory to help administrators and teachers evaluate whether the school is ready to start a community engagement program. The inventory is divided into four sections: family, community, school, and community engagement concerns. How you score in each of these three areas will be a rough indication of your school's readiness to begin the community engagement process we present in this guide. At the beginning of the inventory, there is a short-answer question that deals with your views of community engagement. Once you have finished the inventory, you should take some time to reread your short answer to see if answering the questions has given you a new perspective on community engagement.

Don't be concerned about the score itself. If you've gotten "low" scores on the different sections of the inventory, we suspect many, if not most schools are in the same boat. You might also score "high" on one or two sections, but not on the others. This suggests you are already doing community engagement activities, but may need to work harder (or smarter) in some areas. The underlying purpose of this exercise is to present you with an inventory of ideas that might be useful if you should decide to become involved in this community engagement process. The real question is whether you are ready to make a commitment to this community engagement process. If you are, read on. If not, we wish you the best in your efforts to make your school a better place for learning.

Section Two

Steps in the Community Engagement Process

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Steps in the Community Engagement Process

Community engagement for academic achievement is a new process for many schools. Table 2 provides an overview of school-community engagement ("the process we want") as it is applied to improved academic achievement ("the results we seek"). In other words, your school is ready to commit to the process of community engagement with an already agreed-upon goal of improving student performance. The question is, how do you reach the goal? To improve academic achievement, you need to change what goes on in the classroom, elsewhere in the school, and in the community through programs and practices to improve teaching and learning ("the pathways we promote").

Note that community engagement is not a linear process, with one simple solution for increasing academic achievement. Community engagement will likely offer numerous paths toward higher student performance. Table 2 underscores how community engagement can enhance the relationship between the school and the community based on the common goal of increased academic achievement. Community engagement creates new pathways to view education so that it includes not only students, but also a broad community cross section. In other words, everyone in the community can be a learner, and everyone in the community can be a teacher. Education is a community responsibility, not just the responsibility of professional educators.

Table 2
An Overview of School-Community Engagement for Academic Achievement

The Community Engagement Process	*as applied to*	**Improved Academic Achievement in Rural Schools**
"the process we want"		*"the results we seek"*
	in order to create	
Programs and Practices to Improve Teaching and Learning in the School and the Community		
"the pathways we promote"		

The strength of school-community engagement lies in the premise that local change is best accomplished by local people who know the community's strengths and hopes. While such an effort does take time and may be challenging, it also builds the capacity of local people to help manage other problems in the community.

Community Engagement for Academic Achievement
Four Phases

Steps, Celebration and Team Building, Maintaining Two-Way Communications

The school-community engagement for academic achievement process can be grouped into four broad phases with 11 steps, plus an occasional dose of celebration to keep spirits up and help keep people committed, plus maintaining two-way communications. Here's an outline of the process:

All Phases: *Celebration and Team Building*
All Phases: *Maintaining Two-Way Communications*

PHASE I: *Getting Organized*
1. Commit
2. Establish A Team
3. Select the Co-facilitators

PHASE II: *Studying the Situation*
4. Map Community Assets
5. Collect and Analyze the Data

PHASE III: *Taking Responsive Action*
6. Articulate a Vision and Goals
7. Develop Action Plans
8. Implement Action Plans

PHASE IV: *Evaluating and Reporting Results*
9. Monitor Progress
10. Evaluate and Report on the Impact of Your Action Plan
11. Monitor and Refine the Action Plan

Accompanying the description of each step is a list of suggested activities. These activities are designed to help co-facilitators and team members think about ways of approaching the process of building knowledge about their school and community as they go along. Teams may well tailor these activities to local needs, combine activities, or think up their own approaches. We strongly encourage you to do this in order to create buy-in from all team members and the community.

All Phases: Celebration and Team Building

Throughout the process of school-community engagement for academic achievement, it is important to demonstrate appreciation for individuals, committees, and institutions that

help out along the way. Neither the community engagement team nor its leaders will get far on an empty stomach or empty spirits. There are a number of things the team leaders can do to promote teamwork, unity, and a sense of purpose and progress that sustains the interest and commitment of volunteers. Here are some reasons for celebration:

- getting to know and work with people from different social backgrounds
- sharing good and not-so-good experiences
- learning new things about your school and community
- learning how to gather information and do research
- getting different groups of people to work together, perhaps for the first time
- analyzing information; writing and publicizing a research report
- doing something good for your community

Activity: Celebration Ideas

- Serve a light refreshment at every team meeting.
- Hold a celebrator breakfast, lunch, or dinner after achieving some program milestone.
- Give recognition where it is due, including team members and people in the school and community who helped make the work easier.
- Hold a special orientation meeting to recruit new members and to get existing team members in the habit of speaking positively about team membership.
- Give awards, funny and serious.
- Assemble a team guide containing team goals and action plans, with short biographical sketches on each team member.
- Invite special guests to attend celebration meetings, including community members who have not participated in your events--yet.
- Invite media representatives to a party. Make them feel special. Make sure they have fun and report on the party.
- If there are people with whom you've had disagreements, lavish them with attention at a party. Make sure they have fun and feel part of the festivities, and recognize them for their sincere beliefs and efforts.
- Present a spoof on your research efforts. This can go a long way toward building team solidarity.
- Let team members display their talents.
- Issue a press release listing persons from your community who attend a school-community leadership development program and send it to your local paper.
- Note class/student performance and achievements of students, teachers, staff, and other community members.
- Pick up the phone and call a team member (after hours, on the weekend) just to say thanks.
- Use T-shirts, pens, badges, plaques, or certificates to say "thank you."
- Be sincere and profuse with thanks at the end of every meeting.

Two-Way Communications

School-community engagement for academic achievement is, at root, a public process. Above all, maintain constant two-way communications with school stakeholders. Keep community dialogue focused on academic achievement and its relationship to school and community development. Seek feedback frequently along the way. Constantly work to build and maintain relationships. Develop testimonials from students, faculty, and community members. Use the local media effectively. Develop multiple sources of communications. Don't be shy about documenting and sharing successes and promising to do better if things don't work out as planned.

Activity: Communications Ideas

- Get a weekly or monthly column in the local newspaper to provide updates on team activities. Solicit people from the community to discuss various aspects of community achievement in the column, including alternative viewpoints.
- Use public meetings as often as possible to tell your story and keep stakeholders engaged by allowing them significant input. Meetings should be held in different places and at different times to maximize public access.
- Sponsor community get-togethers to celebrate successes.
- Build networks with school stakeholders in various community groups and businesses. Use the network to keep people updated.
- Set up a mini speakers' bureau.
- Use your local access or school channel on the cable system.
- Get the local radio station to share community service time for discussions of education issues and for public service announcements
- Besides sending home information with schoolchildren, provide inserts for church bulletins and club newsletters, and leave flyers at gas stations, grocery stores, restaurants, the post office, and other places where the public gathers.
- Set up a World Wide Web site. Hold an open house in the school library to show it off, and allow people to e-mail comments to you, or set up a bulletin board for discussions.

Phase I: Getting Organized

Step 1: Commit

The process of school-community engagement for academic achievement is not to be entered into lightly. As we've already suggested, there are risks, especially of conflict. Because building trust is so important, a sense of commitment and sincerity is crucial. From the educator's vantage point, community engagement cannot be viewed as an add-on to a principal's or teacher's list of school responsibilities. Community engagement must be something everyone in the school system practices every day. It must be part of the education culture, and it must be supported by policies. The school administration needs to

model the behavior and devote the time and resources necessary to involve families and the community in efforts to bolster student achievement.

Activity: Determining School Readiness for Community Engagement

The school readiness for community engagement inventory (Appendix C) offers a starting point for discussions about making the commitment to proceed. If you have not already completed the inventory as suggested in Section 1 of this guide, do so now. Typically, school administrators may hold their own exploratory meetings. As we noted earlier, administrators will most likely make the first step to include community members in discussions about school improvement. The decision to proceed must be based on the firm commitment of school officials to take on a community engagement process that is truly participatory, broad-based, and responsive to diverse community needs, while maintaining a focus on student achievement. Along with results of the inventory, these discussion questions might help school staff decide whether they are ready to make the commitment to begin a community engagement effort.

1. What can the process of community engagement add to the school?
2. How can it enrich the community?
3. How might it benefit the individuals who volunteer to participate?
4. What is our "problem" with student achievement? Why are we here?
5. Are there other people not at the table who could help increase student achievement?
6. What are the community's *educational* needs?
7. What available community services that complement educational needs of children and families can the school tap into? Who provides these educational services to the community? How could educational service providers work together? What resources could the school share with other educational service providers? Is there an interagency council to help coordinate educational services?
8. To what extent are parents and other community members already involved in education? What potential is there for additional involvement?
9. Do "shakers and movers" in the community desire to help out with a community engagement process?
10. What financial and staff resources can the school offer a community engagement process?
11. What resources does the school have to share with the broader community?
12. What resources does the broader community have to share with the school?
13. Do administrators, teachers, and staff have sufficient time and energy to put into a long-term effort that could take some time to complete?
14. Is there a widespread, deep-seated belief among school or district leaders, as well as faculty and staff, that community engagement promises to be a fruitful way to bolster academic achievement?
15. What is the extent of lingering doubts about school-community engagement for academic achievement?

Other questions may emerge in your community, but it is particularly important to establish early the duration and intensity of the community engagement process. Once you've made the commitment to proceed, you are ready to call on some community folks to get the process started.

Step 2: Establish a Team

The role of the team is to get broad representation and participation of diverse stakeholder groups to positively influence academic achievement in schools. The team will, over time, become (1) a source of knowledge about the school, especially in the area of academic achievement; (2) a source of knowledge about community assets that can make the school's job easier; (3) a rallying point for school and community improvement. Both the school and the community will benefit from the increased communication, cooperation, coordination, and collaboration. Getting everyone on board with the process and developing the focus and expectations for collaborative planning may take several meetings.

Engaging Community Members

In engaging community members to work with and to support schools for academic achievement, a team may be structured so that the following statements hold true for the team:

1. It is established from an already existing group, expanded to include additional groups or individuals, or created as a new entity.
2. Team members receive training in teamwork, meeting management, consensus building and decision making, resolution and management of disagreements, basic research methods, action plan development, and other specific ways of managing group productivity.
3. Depending on local circumstances, team size may vary over time. The team may operate with a relatively small nucleus that meets regularly to guide and manage the process; this group must be representative of the community, and must not be secretive in its activities. In this case, a larger group meets as needed to provide input, approve plans, and help with research tasks. The team may also temporarily recruit experts from the community to help with various phases of the research.
4. The team receives external technical support as needed, but is self-directed and self-sustaining. Sources of technical support include colleges or universities, county extension offices, local business owners and operators, nonprofit organizations, and others from the community and surrounding areas with the desired expertise.
5. The work of the team is action-oriented. The data collection and analysis phase is crucial to the community engagement process. The team's job is to evaluate both the strengths and weaknesses of the school's academic program and to engage a wide cross section of the community in constructive dialogue about ways to improve the school and the

community. Deliberations must not be so protracted that concrete actions are delayed and opportunities for change are missed.

6. The team's work is developmental for itself, the school, and the community, based on the notion of continuous improvement. The team will get better and smarter by doing something together. Some team members will come and go. Not everyone has to contribute in exactly the same way. Team members should be encouraged to "think big about academic achievement," but to start small, and to seek early practical successes and build on them.
7. The team has a clear sense of mission and goals. This can greatly assist planning and implementation. When sponsors, schools, and community members all have different ideas about what the goals are, each may define goals from their own particular interests or perspective.

Other Aspects of Establishing the Team

Local planners should consider other aspects of establishing the team, including these:

1. Leadership: One school leader and one community leader become co-facilitators (See Step 3).
2. Full participation: Everyone has something important to do and to contribute.
3. Shared purpose: Everyone owns the work and agrees what needs to be done to increase academic achievement.
4. Open communication: Information is shared with everyone.
5. Focus on the future: The team determines where it wants the school and the community to be in one year, a few years, and five years in terms of student achievement.
6. Innovation: Change is brought about through creative solutions.
7. Results-centered orientation: Efforts are directed toward improving student learning and the culture of education in the community.
8. Availability of coaching and assistance: Local agencies and their partner organizations make technical assistance available to the team and the school.
9. Adequate endowment: The team has the time, authority, and resources necessary to do the job.
10. School commitment: Teachers, staff, and students serve on the team, and the principal and other administrators actively support team activities.

Activity: Select and Recruit a Diverse Team

It is especially important to work the margins–that is, to bring in members of the school or community who do not traditionally engage in these types of activities. The team composition must represent to some extent the community's income characteristics, as well as gender, race, geography, and various roles. This means including a wide variety of school

stakeholders, such as parents (including single parents), students, teachers and other school staff, the elderly, people who don't have children in the school, professionals, the working poor, welfare recipients, business owners and managers, civil servants, representatives of nonprofit and grassroots organizations, clergy, and civic leaders. Potential team members may best be contacted at sporting events, church meetings, the grocery store or post office, or other local gathering places. (Appendix D contains a team roster for keeping track of team members.)

Hold a meeting that allows team members to get to know one another. Use the information found in Appendix A, "What the Research Says about Community Engagement," and Appendix B, "Dealing with Change and Disagreements" to discuss possible benefits and challenges of the work you're beginning together. But keep things on a positive note: the meeting should be structured to encourage team members to share their hopes and dreams with other members.

Step 3: Select Co-facilitators

At least two persons should be selected from the team to be co-facilitators–one from the school and one from the community. Two facilitators are better than one; three or four facilitators might be helpful, depending on your community's circumstances. Co-facilitators can share responsibilities, be in two places at once, and can lessen the potential for burnout. School administrators might want to resist the temptation to choose the co-facilitators and instead let team members do the choosing. Co-facilitators have five major responsibilities:

1. Plan, prepare for, and facilitate community engagement team meetings, including distributing a meeting agenda and a summary of meeting discussions and decisions. Co-facilitators may find the Community Engagement Team Planning Sheet and the detailed discussion about the role of co-facilitators (both in Appendix E) helpful.
2. Inform team members about academic achievement goals and resources, upcoming meetings, and training opportunities.
3. Communicate, coordinate, and collaborate with school-community partners, school administrators, and district officials, as necessary, and maintaining records of communications.
4. Keep notes and records to document and assess team progress over time.
5. Maintain a community engagement activity log.

Effective co-facilitators tend to share some characteristics. They

- don't give orders, but help team members decide together how to get things done
- are willing to initiate conversation and don't wait for someone else to get the ball rolling
- strive to be inclusive by helping to overcome prejudices, distrust, and past confrontations by facilitating communications that transcend social, political, and economic boundaries
- aren't expected to know everything, but should help the team tap available resources to carry out the tasks at hand

- aren't afraid to ask for help from team members or from outsiders
- organize school and community members to participate in the planning and action process
- demonstrate high expectations and encourage strength and capabilities of others
- are self-confident
- are good at using the skills and knowledge of individual team members in order to attain the team's goals
- provide a clear sense of direction
- are good communicators and, especially, good listeners because they tend to listen without interrupting and know how to improve the quality of conversation
- ask questions that investigate a community's shared vision or core beliefs of what a school should be
- know the value of building good relationships
- are not always task oriented
- motivate school and community members to tackle complex issues and to work toward consensus
- know how to facilitate change
- ask for others' opinions rather than always offering their own
- learn how to share leadership by negotiating decision making rather than dictating it and helping other team members develop leadership skills
- recognize everyone's contributions and make each team member feel important
- have a responsibility to the group and its work, rather than to individuals in the group
- engage school and community members to support and participate in the action plan; they convene meetings to plan, do, and review joint efforts for promoting academic achievement
- document discussions, decisions, and actions in order to learn from the process; they recognize the importance of record keeping
- press for increased communication, coordination, and collaboration; they help manage the process of information exchanges
- keep the team on track; they keep meetings to the point and work within the accepted time line. They do not make decisions for the group. They suggest ways to make decisions and plans necessary for achieving the team's goals
- know how to compliment team members for good work
- know when to have fun to break the tension

Co-facilitators must remember that their job is to facilitate meetings and work with team members to reach consensus. They should not be decision makers. Their role is to protect the community engagement process and make sure the team stays on track toward improving student achievement and community well-being. Co-facilitators may exercise the right to interrupt a speaker to keep a meeting on track; to be a participant and follow the same rules for speaking to the subject as everyone else; to speak out of turn to move the meeting along; and to make minor judgment calls on the agenda as the meeting progresses without asking the group's permission.

Selecting, training, and supporting the co-facilitators are important parts of getting organized. Co-facilitators need to be perceived as leaders, have a personal history of community involvement, and be seriously motivated by the goals and directions of the project. Leadership does not have to come from the usual actors in the community, but may emerge naturally from some unexpected places. Being a co-facilitator requires perspective:

- Raising academic achievement won't happen overnight.
- Action plans may need to be repeated, revised, or rejected.
- Some people will leave the team before a plan is even written.
- The capacity to "start over" over and over again is part of the challenge of change.

Here are some basic rules for facilitators to live by:

- Keep plans simple, especially at the outset.
- Build on successes.
- Keep the focus on student learning opportunities and achievement.
- Be practical.
- Take action together.

Process and Change

Community engagement is a process that develops over time. Both co-facilitators and team members must be sensitive to changes in the team. In many ways, teams are like individual people. They develop a certain personality. They grow in stages, tending to become more mature and more productive. They may need guidance along the way. They may need rules to follow. They rely on periods of fun and cordial working relationships. Successes and failures are major events, causes for rejoicing and for mourning. Successes and failures offer opportunities for growth.

The role of the co-facilitators may change as a team passes through various phases of growth and development. At first, co-facilitators introduce the new team members to community engagement and provide an overall sense of planning and direction. At this point, many team members are anxious or uncertain about their roles and relationships with other team members. Co-facilitators need to help people feel comfortable and give them a sense of direction.

Soon, however, team members may engage in a debate over the group's planned purpose and direction. Some new people will take on leadership roles. This is good, even if there is some rivalry and disagreement among members. At this point, co-facilitators need to be wary about members who actively resist "joining" the team, holding out for their own ideas about what the team should be and do. Some members may try to dominate discussion or manipulate the group to get their own way. Co-facilitators need to be sensitive about their role as leaders, while helping other leaders grow and fulfill their roles on the team.

Before long, team members should begin to agree on a few priorities for study. Team members begin to accept their own roles and those of others. The team's attention will turn toward getting things done. Co-facilitators still need to be aware of team members' feelings at this point, but there will be more emphasis on the group's task and how to reach research goals. Their job will be to help the team to move beyond planning and to work on reaching those goals (collecting, analyzing, and summarizing data about the school and the community) in the smoothest way possible.

Sometimes, the team will seem to get stuck. Co-facilitators need to recognize this problem and try to get things moving again. Team members may be helpful in moving the process along, or it may be necessary to get help from an outsider who can come in, observe the group, and offer some suggestions on how to get back on track. Help might be available from the school system, a government agency, a business leader, a nonprofit organization, a community college, the county extension agent, or a nearby college or university. This raises an important point. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

Bringing in outside help to get the team moving can be beneficial to resolve conflict, solve a problem with a research method or tool, or help with data analysis and interpretation. At times like this, the team may need a set of "fresh eyes" to look at the situation and build consensus to get things moving again. When should you decide to bring in outside help? This is a tough call and depends on the situation. If there seems to be a conflict that defies resolution, then its time to call in outside help; in this case, co-facilitators must decide if all avenues of discussion have been exhausted. The use of outside help here is a last resort, but is absolutely crucial to the well-being of the team and its members. In other words, you need to read the level of conflict and its effect on the team and its members; and decide to bring in help in order to limit damage and get the process moving again. If the team's movement is stalled by a problem with a research tool or data analysis, there should be no question about getting expertise as soon as possible. It's a given that the team will expand or contract over time as needs change.

As the research nears completion, the team begins to give serious consideration to planned actions. By then, there should be a lot of goodwill among team members. Team members are cooperating at problem solving and are ready to tell the public what they've learned.

Ways to Collaborate

With the help of the co-facilitators, the team can collaborate with the school and community members in the following ways:

- advocate for continuous improvement in learning resources, conditions, and support for academic achievement

- provide feedback to school and community groups about community concerns and interests
- locate support and materials for advancement of the team's action plan priorities
- help identify needs of academic programs
- help secure funds needed to equip classrooms and purchase equipment, including computers
- link with business leaders via e-mail to exchange information about academic requirements expected at work sites
- develop resource documents listing local businesses and how each draws on academic skills developed in rural schools
- share information obtained through educational service providers
- involve school representatives in working with community members at special events and functions
- communicate the school's needs and achievements (progress toward goals) to the community

Sweet Success

There is no simple recipe for success for a school-community engagement team seeking to build academic success. A lot depends on leadership. Co-facilitators take on what at times may seem an impossible project. They work with volunteers who may be strangers at the beginning. They hope the volunteers will develop camaraderie and will grow to understand the school and bring about positive changes. Co-facilitators have to keep people interested, excited, and on task for months at a time. This sounds tough. It is. Remember, the goal is to improve life in your community and school, focusing on student academic achievement. This focus is your strength. Keep it in mind.

With good leadership, community engagement teams can take on a number of tasks that will bolster students' academic achievement, including these:

- provide expanded training opportunities for teachers, community members, parents, students, and concerned citizens
- join with PTA and other school-based committees, work-based initiatives, and groups to write proposals for additional funding
- work with parents to encourage and support student learning in all academic areas
- participate in understanding the school's vision for learning and determining how curriculum standards will be developed, implemented, and assessed
- support and promote exemplary practices—opportunities where subjects come alive and teachers and students discover community resources (people, places, issues, and opportunities) that draw upon knowledge every day to create student interest in learning

- improve and expand communication about learning among teachers, students, parents, community members, and businesses; distribute newsletters, brochures, and fact sheets; provide speakers to other organizations in the community
- convene public meetings to conduct conversations about the importance of strong academic preparation for all students
- leverage additional resources for learning through collaboration with civic and business organizations, coalitions, alliances, and networks
- form dynamic, purposeful partnerships that "get things done"; a partnership can plan and carry out educational projects that meet local school needs, for example, it might decide to assemble learning kits, coordinate field trips, establish homework clubs, locate tutors, or set up Internet access
- advise and support efforts of school leadership, school district administrators, and school board members to set and act on policies that encourage parent and community involvement in the academic education of all students

Working with Volunteers

Working with volunteers can be rewarding, but there are pitfalls. Volunteers give selflessly, without receiving much in return and sometimes at personal inconvenience and expense. They are the team's greatest asset, and work doesn't get done without them. They should be treated with respect. Their talents and time should be used well. They shouldn't be overworked. They should have fun along the way.

Co-facilitators certainly need to keep the team on task, doing the necessary work that helps the team learn what it needs to learn. But there is a second and equally important goal. They must maintain the team, keeping it in good working order and building camaraderie. This function is important because one of the biggest problems in a volunteer organization is burnout. Volunteers start out enthusiastic, work hard, and suddenly go kaput and stop coming to meetings. If this happens, it's time for the co-facilitators to do a critical self-review. Here's the blunt reality: volunteer burnout often stems from poor leadership. Attracting and maintaining volunteers is an art form, and team leaders must be skilled and creative. It is important to pay attention to the way people feel, to let them express their differing opinions, and to make the experience as enjoyable as possible. A rationale for using co-facilitators, a description of their responsibilities, and a planning guide for their use are located in Appendix E.

Phase Two: Studying the Situation

Activity: Select Co-facilitators and Structure the Team

Team members should meet to review the description of ideal team facilitators outlined in the preceding paragraphs, then select co-facilitators. The team may also decide on a time and place for the next meeting and receive any articles or other information to be read before that meeting. The new co-facilitators might agree to mail a copy of the team roster to all team members along with a reminder of the next meeting.

Taking time to study the community's situation is important. Moving ahead before common purposes, goals, or needs have been identified can lead to misunderstandings among potential partners or result in ineffective action down the line. It takes time to build commitment and to base decisions on complete and accurate information. The team must decide what information to gather and how to gather it. This is a local call, depending both on the nature of the school's record keeping and the community's history of involvement with the school.

- If the school-community engagement team is established after a lengthy data collection and analysis effort, such as a school self-study or accreditation report, there may be less need for the activities included in Steps 4 and 5 below. Instead, the team might choose to use the data and information already available to identify opportunities for collaborative action.
- If the team is assembled in response to a specific issue, problem, or need that is well known but not well defined, the team may be able to narrow its search for information, but may choose to seek more detail about the situation to build appropriate action plans.
- If a team is recruited to take action precisely because there has been no recent systematic inquiry and analysis into academic achievement, the team may want to complete all or most of the activities listed in Steps 4 and 5.

Step 4. Map Community Assets

In this step, the school-community engagement team defines the community to be served. This may not be as easy as you think. The first impulse may be to say, "Our community is defined by the attendance zone of the school." This might suffice if the school's boundaries more or less coincide with the town limits. But that is not often the case. One way of looking at a school's community is to consider a reasonable area of daily travel and commerce by the parents of children in the school and other people in the school's boundaries. Where do people work? Where do they shop? Where do they go to church? Where do they go to relax? If the team is studying an elementary school, what is the feeder area of the high school? Where do students from the high school go to work in the local area

after graduation? What are the district boundaries? Asking questions like these will help you figure out what the community looks like.

A description of your community can include much more than just geographical boundaries. Existing assets and capacities should also be determined. The task is to build on community strengths by acknowledging, documenting, and reporting these assets. This is not intended to be a negative exercise. Although it is important to understand your community's weaknesses, it is vital to know and build upon your community's strengths. Negatives should be considered as places for improvement, not obstacles to success.

One good way to approach this task is to create an asset map that shows the resources and supports within the community on which community-in-school and school-in-community programs may be built. Asset mapping is a positively oriented team action and can result in team members (1) becoming more aware of existing resources and connections; (2) becoming more appreciative of their own talents, interests, capacities, and resources; and (3) becoming more confident in their ability to take positive actions that make a genuine contribution to academic achievement. The asset map may also motivate people to take action and to promote relationships and trust. It becomes the basis for more positive and productive talking, discovering, and connecting among school and community members. An asset map is an early team product that can be shared with other audiences to keep people informed about the team's work. It can be copied and distributed at faculty meetings or reproduced in church bulletins, school district newsletters, or local newspapers.

Aids to asset mapping include the telephone book's Yellow Pages, a Chamber of Commerce directory, a statewide business council publication, information from the state economic development agency, the U.S. Department of Commerce (especially U.S. Census and Bureau of Economic Analysis data), and the reference desk at the public library.

An asset map provides only the basics for beginning a careful look at academic achievement. The map should emphasize a "can" instead of a "should" attitude and may give more hope as community members realize just how rich their asset base is. In addition, the map might reveal niches where residents can start businesses, set up service organizations, and take other measures to build community capacity.

On the following pages, we list several different ways to approach community asset mapping. Feel free to pick and choose among activities or develop a hybrid method of your own.

Activity: Generate A Community Profile

Community profiles help identify local assets, resources, conditions, and activities and reveal gaps, barriers, or needs. Appendix F contains a community profile that seeks basic

information about the community. In generating a profile, the team will need to do the following:

- Collect basic information about the community, such as population, types of households, educational attainment, and income levels.
- Collect current information on all or selected academic areas.
- Identify existing community resources that support learning in those areas.
- Review the school improvement plan.
- Prepare a profile of school and community partnerships to strengthen academic learning.
- List community resource agencies that work with the school or are potential partners.

Here are some suggestions that might help you describe existing school and community characteristics related to academic achievement:

- Describe academic programs in your school, using available test scores, grade distributions, course selection booklets, and class enrollments to make your points.
- Describe the kinds of community activities that already support academic achievement in your school.
- Define how community engagement might strengthen your existing school improvement plan.
- Describe the nature of existing school-community partnerships.

All of the information collected will be useful in defining the school community. This definition is crucial for understanding the school's relationship to various parts of the community, for determining potential partners, and for developing strategies to reach out to the various school stakeholders.

Activity: Inventory Community Capacity

An inventory defines six different kinds of assets: individual, institutional, federal and state, organizational, physical, and cultural. Use the form in Appendix G to help you draw up a list of these assets for your community. Then you can begin a discussion of how they can be used to bolster academic achievement and how the school can help build the community's assets. Many of the individuals and organizations listed below, as well as the physical assets, can be incorporated into curricular and extracurricular activities. Your community may have additional assets not mentioned here.

- Individual Assets -
Skills, talents, experiences of school and community members

- Institutional -
Hospitals
Schools
Churches
Library
College or university
Police department
Fire department

- Federal and State -
Extension Service/4-H
U.S. Forest Service
Bureau of Land Management
Small Business Administration
Agricultural Credit
Rural Development Agency
Telecommunications Agency
School Service Center
State Education Agency
Natural Resources Department
Economic Development Department
Local Development District

- Organizational Assets -
Newspaper
Radio and TV
Utilities
Small and large businesses
Home-based enterprises
Nonprofit groups
Religious organizations
Cooperatives
Cable company
Business associations
Citizen groups

- Physical Assets -
Lakes, ponds
Vacant land
Industrial structures
Energy resources
Waste resources
Parks/recreation areas
Natural sites
Agriculture
Mining
Forest

- Cultural Assets -
Historic/Arts groups
Ethnic/Racial diversity/heritage
Crafts, other skills
Cultural organizations
Military facility

Activity: Conduct a "Windshield Survey"

Here's a tool for getting to know your school and community better: Do a "windshield survey" (see Appendix H) of your community with your fellow team members. Drive around various areas of your community and make notes of what you see. Take a detailed area map with you to help with your note taking. All of the time, you should be thinking about the school and academic achievement and their relationship to the community and the land it lies on.

You might want to ask questions such as these:

- How does the school district fit into the geographic area of the community?
- How are settlements in the school community located in relationship to one another and in relationship to the school?

- How are residents of the community spread across the land generally and in relationship to the school?
- What are the patterns of residence based on race or ethnicity?
- How is the land being used?
- Are there large pieces of land owned by government agencies or private companies?
- Is there land that appears not to be in use?
- Is the land flat, rolling, hilly, or mountainous?
- Is the land bare, covered with grass, covered with trees, in crops, in pasture, etc.?
- Are there natural or other places in the community that could be used for outdoor school laboratories?
- What historic/cultural sites are there in the community?
- Do some areas seem poorer than others?
- Where are businesses located in relationship to the school?
- What kinds of businesses are there? Remember to consider both profit and nonprofit businesses.
- What kinds of work opportunities are there for students?
- What kinds of businesses are missing?
- What kinds of businesses could students start in the community that would fill an empty niche?
- How could existing businesses be enlisted in helping to increase academic achievement?
- If there are relatively few businesses, where do people work?
- Are there places where students could participate in voluntary activities?
- How old are the houses?
- What is the condition of housing in different areas?
- Where is new housing being built?
- Where are other facilities, such as social service agencies, churches, and libraries, located in relationship to the school?
- What is the condition of roads and bridges?
- How difficult is it to drive a school bus on the roads?
- What types of traffic hazards are there?
- How hard is it to get to school or work from certain places?
- What can these observations show you about your school community?

Better yet, put yourselves in the shoes of students. Have everyone from the team hop on a school bus and follow the normal daily routine of the route, stopping at all of the stops. Consider asking the questions suggested above. Here are some other questions to consider: How long does it take to get from one end of the route to the other? Does the distance from the school pose problems for students who must ride the route every school day? Does distance from the school have anything to do with getting and keeping people from the community involved in the school?

Best of all, take along some people from the community who have expertise and who can help give richer information for your tour. People with broad knowledge about your community might include the school superintendent, a county extension agent, a social

worker, a law enforcement officer, a member of the clergy, a community activist, a highway engineer, or a county official. Let them tell you about different areas of the county, who lives there, and the types of problems these residents encounter in their daily lives.

Activity: Map the Locations of People and Resources

People and resources are what keep communities going. The community's prosperity is closely linked to the quality of relationships that allow people to share resources. This three-step exercise is intended to help you locate your community's assets, map those assets, and begin to develop school-community relationships.

Step 1. Locate the community's assets

- Define the community's geographic boundaries.
- Identify institutions, service organizations, and businesses.
- Identify citizens groups and associations in the community.
- Identify citizens with special talents, abilities, or capacities.
- Identify other stakeholders.

Step 2. Do a visual depiction of the assets

- Use a current local map to locate resources in relationship to each other, to families, and the school.
- Be sure to map service categories such as day care, tutoring, cultural and natural amenities, etc.
- Assemble a service directory and map of community resources, including descriptions of their services.
- Use the map as a way to identify challenges and opportunities.
- Use the map to help direct activities once a need or goal is identified.

Step 3. Help develop relationships, partnerships, and collaboration

- Set up a community expo at the school for businesses and agencies, perhaps in conjunction with a school festival or parent-teacher night.
- Use athletic events to highlight local service organizations that promote academic achievement.
- Make personal contact with community members to see if they are interested in becoming involved with each other and the school.
- Promote the school as a location for meetings of community groups with common interests.
- Open the school library and computer facilities to public use.

Step 5. Collect and Analyze the Data

You don't have to be a trained expert to do research. In fact, you've already done considerable research by mapping community assets. Does that knowledge make you even more curious? You're well on your way if you continue to ask a lot of questions about your community and your school, with an eye toward academic achievement. In fact, local citizens usually know a lot about what's going on in their community or can use their own knowledge and contacts to find out.

The most important part of research is being systematic. School-community engagement teams must be careful in the way they collect information, record it, organize it, and analyze it. It is crucial to develop a research plan at the very beginning with the goal of asking the right questions to gain access to the information you need. Here are some straightforward guidelines for doing research:

- Plan, plan, plan.
- Remember that good research results grow out of good questions. The way you ask questions has much to do with the kind of answers you get.
- You need to find out if the information you need is available before building your whole research strategy on it. Check first, then plan.
- Use your team's skills, knowledge, and personal contacts. People often have unseen talents and skills. Or they may know people who can provide energy or information.
- Let the team help choose the research methods.
- Keep your methods simple. You don't need a complicated statistical analysis if some simple percentages will make the picture clear.
- Enjoy yourselves.
- Be analytical. Whatever you are studying, try to break it into understandable pieces that maintain a working relationship with one another.
- Keep focused on academic achievement. If one method doesn't tell you what you need to know, don't be afraid to try another.
- Ask for help if you need it. There are plenty of local resources available. Don't forget to check your local library and the World Wide Web. There are many resources written by people who have tackled some of the same problems you are facing.
- Adapt your methods to your community. This is an opportunity to be creative and to have fun.
- Research is a learning process from beginning to end. Take time to reflect on what you've learned while you're doing the research. If you take the time for reflection, you will be able to build on what you've already learned while you're doing the research project, instead of trying to assemble scattered notes at the end of the project.
- Celebrate your successes along the way.

A Sampling of Research Techniques

Below are some useful research techniques for understanding academic achievement in rural schools and communities:

- Review information that's been gathered already, such as school and state reports, including test scores.
- Use letters to the local newspaper editor as a preliminary gauge of community concerns.
- Analyze activities and comments at school board or school council meetings.
- Document your activities with photography, audiotapes or videotapes.
- Collect information over a limited period of time, such as classroom observations during a quarter or semester.
- Interview selected individuals for current or historical perspectives.
- Use focus groups (interviews) to gather opinions and perceptions, from students, faculty, administrators, board members, parents, and other stakeholders.
- Activate organized "telephone trees" (numbers assigned to various team members) to gather community opinions.
- Arrange for a radio call-in program to solicit listeners' comments on education and community issues.
- Visit the state education agency; interview staff members, and ask to use their data if it differs from the school's.
- Obtain relevant records from the school board, school council, or PTA.
- Hold a "listening" weekend using trained community volunteers to canvass the community and ask local residents about education and community development.
- Develop a survey about key issues or concerns and distribute it to schools, churches, or community organizations. Work together to compile and analyze the responses.
- Conduct visits to schools and exchange impressions and observations.
- Convene open, public forums held in civic, religious, and business institutions.

Sorting It All Out

After applying the chosen research methods and sifting through the data, team members should be getting some answers to their research questions about academic achievement. The question is, are you getting the "right" answers? We are not only talking about answers that you agree or disagree with. You may indeed learn things that contradict what you already think you know. It is extremely important to keep an open mind when sorting through data. Do the answers help team members in their understanding of academic achievement? If the answers aren't helping, it might be necessary to change the research plan and ask new questions. If the answers are helping, there may be even more questions to answer.

Data analysis is in no way a straight-line process. Researchers learn and then raise new questions. Sometimes, they go back over old areas of inquiry to take a new look from a

different perspective. In working with school-community relationships and academic achievement, you will often find yourself asking: "What does it mean?" Team members must analyze and interpret information. The way they view answers to questions is based on their life experiences in the community. This is the reason for have a learning team that broadly represents the community. There may not be "right" answers, and team members might disagree on what the information says. This may make for some lively meetings.

In analyzing and interpreting data, team members should look for patterns and relationships and divide them into themes or ideas. Sometimes, patterns and relationships will emerge right away. Sometimes, data must be "teased" or "massaged" by arranging pieces in different ways to see if patterns emerge. Computers are helpful here, but you also can arrange and rearrange individual cards or pieces of paper containing bits of data under various themes. This rearrangement of data may yield different interpretations of what you are finding, and is an important part of the research process. You might find yourself reporting different interpretations to the community, another indicator that there may not be any "right" answers." In addition, there may be pieces of information that don't fit. Team members, with their knowledge of the community, may be able to explain these anomalies. Sometimes, you might have to go out for more information to develop an explanation for these anomalies.

Here are a few tips for analyzing data:

- Your research plan grew out of the need to understand academic achievement and the methods chosen to study school-community relationships. When team members start to look at the data, every shortcoming in the research design is magnified. For example, if you've done a mail or phone survey and forgotten to request some vital piece of information, you are in for trouble. In many cases, it's possible to get the needed information, especially if you're working with existing data or public records; you can go back to the source and get the needed pieces of data. But if you're working with people, it might be a tremendous inconvenience to get lost data. To avoid this pitfall, make sure you plan in advance and document every step in your research process. In addition, learn from your mistakes in case you do research in the future.
- It is crucial to keep an open mind when analyzing data. You may get some surprises, and you should be able to change your mind if necessary. It is important to balance an open mind against giving up what you know to be true too quickly, however. Nothing is certain in this world, but if your personal experience doesn't agree with what you're finding, it's time to grow cautious. Facts may be in the eyes of the beholder. Here's where the perspectives of different team members are helpful.
- Where there are differences in opinion about what the data say, you need to respect everyone's views. If differences in interpretation persist, it is important to air them in the final report.
- If the data analysis gets mired, ask someone else to help. The different perspective might do the job.

- Both the research design and the data analysis should be simple and straightforward. Life in any community is extremely complicated. The trick to analyzing data is to capture its essence and present it clearly. There is a risk of oversimplification, but you can always supplement your analysis with additional evidence, if necessary.

Even if the team agrees on data interpretation, it is smart to get community feedback to see if others have alternative interpretations. Alternative views, whether from the team or the general public, should be included in the final report.

Asking for Help

The U.S. Department of Education funds 10 regional education laboratories that develop school research and programs. Also, 16 Education Resources Information Center (ERIC) clearinghouses provide information to educators, parents, students, policymakers and others who are interested in various aspects of schools. Resources from Appalachia Educational Laboratory include:

- The *AEL Web Page:* http://www.ael.org/

- The *Rural Center* does research into rural education and can help you connect with service providers. Staff can help you find information, materials, and sources of assistance.

- The *ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools* will help you learn more about rural school issues by tapping into an international database on education issues. ERIC staff can help you connect your school needs with other resource partners, get help finding resource persons, and get research-based information on building your local action plan. You can reach the clearinghouse through a toll-free phone line (800-624-9120), by mail (P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325-1348), or by e-mail (ericrc@ael.org). The ERIC Web Site is at http://ael.org/eric/.

- The School Services Center responds to calls for assistance through a toll-free phone line (800-624-9120), by mail (P.O. Box 1348, Charleston, WV 25325-1348), by e-mail (aelinfo@ael.org), or by contacts with staff.

- *Family Connections* publishes two sets of 30 guides to help parents and children to have fun together doing things that enhance early childhood learning. The program emphasizes school-parent partnerships.

- The *Planning, Research and Evaluation* unit provides fee-based services to assist with program and impact evaluation, quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis, focus group design and moderation, interview design and analysis, group facilitation, and survey construction.

- *Quest* is a five-year collaborative research project to better understand how schools can create continuous school improvement that leads to increased student learning. Quest is based on these core beliefs: improvement is a process; energy for improvement comes from collaboration; searching is more important than finding; and schools establish themselves as a community of learners to facilitate improvement.

- *QUILT (Questioning and Understanding to Improve Learning and Thinking)* creates an environment that leads to greater interaction between teachers and students and better student mastery of material. Every student is involved in answering every question, and discussions require higher-level thinking. QUILT classrooms teach problem solving, decision making, conceptualizing, critical thinking, creative thinking, and metaphoric thinking.

- *Comprehensive School Reform Demonstration Program (CSRD)* is a new federal program to help local schools implement comprehensive reforms based on reliable research, effective practices, emphasis on basic academics, and parental involvement. Each state is responsible for setting up its own schedule to implement the program and competitive process.

- *iti@ael.org* (a listserv) is an electronic discussion list for persons interested in team-planned interdisciplinary instruction. To join the list, send an electronic mail message to majordomo@ael.org. Leave the subject line blank. In the body of your message, type: subscribe iti <your e-mail address>. You will receive a message confirming your membership and further instructions for posting messages or unsubscribing from the list.

Activity: Visit with the School and Community

The school-community engagement team does not work apart from the school or community. The team immerses itself in the school-community setting that it is trying to serve by tailoring one or more of the research methods listed above to meet the needs of the community. In this activity, your job is to visit schools and talk with community members with three questions in mind:

1. What do we see in our school and community that signals the importance of academic achievement?
2. What do we hear in our school and community that tells us that reading, writing, reasoning, and investigating are prized highly?
3. How do teachers, administrators, parents, taxpayers, and other stakeholders define high levels of academic achievement?

After collecting and analyzing the data, the team disseminates findings from these visitations and meetings in the community to familiarize a wide range of people with

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After collecting and analyzing the data, the team disseminates findings from these visitations and meetings in the community to familiarize a wide range of people with activities that support high standards of academic achievement. (Appendix I contains a questionnaire that can be used to measure community support for academic achievement.)

Activity: Reach Consensus on Academic Achievement Indicators

The primary targets for school-community engagement efforts are increased student performance in four core academic content areas: mathematics, English/language arts, science, and social studies (history, economics, and geography).

School-community engagement teams may examine a variety of data sources to determine overall student performance in these core content areas and to identify specific areas where community partnerships can help increase opportunities to learn and lead to increased learning results. Data sources and indicators of academic achievement include these:

- state test scores
- standardized tests–the percentage of students performing successfully on subtests in each academic content areas (ACT, SAT)
- student attendance rates–the percentage of students absent ten or fewer days per year
- graduation rate–the percentage of students earning a high school diploma or certificate
- college acceptance rate–the percentage of students accepted at two- and four-year educational programs
- returning graduates–the percentage of students who go off to college or military service and return to the community on completion
- GED completion rates–the percentage of students who enroll in GED programs after dropping out

- retention rate–percentage of students not meeting requirements for promotion to the next grade
- pupil teacher ratio–percentage of classes with 25 or fewer students
- local employment rates–percentage of students not continuing their education who are employed locally within a year after high school graduation
- extracurricular activities–percentage of students who participate in school-sponsored clubs, sports, and academic activities beyond school hours.
- course completion rates–percentage of students successfully completing college preparatory, vocational-technical, and general courses of study; percentage of students completing world language, mathematics, science, technology, English, and social studies courses; percentage of students completing upper-level courses or advance-placement courses
- instructional hours–number of instructional days per year, instructional hours per day
- perceptions of teachers regarding the quality of the school curriculum and its relationship to how students are performing or meeting standards
- perceptions of employers about competencies demonstrated by recent graduates
- community-based learning opportunities
- student, teacher, parent, and community perceptions of academic activities
- school audits, accreditation reports, and planning documents

The data sources listed above suggest there are a number of different ways to gain an understanding of academic achievement in your community. A wealth of data actually makes research easier because it allows you to look at academic achievement from different perspectives. Three questions guide this activity:

1. Which of these data sources should we select for more in-depth analysis?
2. How will we collect the data and information we need for dialogue and decisionmaking?
3. How will we use this information to link community assets to student needs?

The data sources you select for in-depth analysis depend on the availability of the data and your community's needs. For example, you might want to choose two very different data sources, such as test scores and community perceptions. This choice would give you two different views of academic achievement. Test scores are a direct measure of academic achievement and should be readily available. You will have to develop your own method for learning about community perceptions, but doing so will allow you to compare the level of test scores with community perceptions of academic achievement. Such an analysis might be useful in helping to build community support for academic achievement and helping to link the community's assets to student needs.

Activity: Summarize What You Have Learned So Far

The school-community engagement team summarizes its findings on academic achievement in a brief written report that may include a list of research findings about school-

community collaboration, a list of the academic indicators selected, tables or charts of data, summaries of surveys or interviews, and broad suggestions for action.

Three questions guide this activity:

- What are our schools already doing well to prepare students academically?
- What areas seem to be in most need of improvement?
- How can these needs be addressed through expanded use of community assets and resources to promote academic achievement?

This "work in progress" report can be used to generate additional input and to seek support through community forums; discussion groups; or meetings of civic, business, and church groups. The report stops short of providing detailed action plans, but is disseminated widely in the community as a catalyst for discussion. It should be modified to account for public input as part of moving on to taking responsive action.

Phase Three: Taking Responsive Action

After completing community asset mapping activities and data gathering and analysis related to academic achievement, school-community engagement team members determine priorities, develop joint action plans, and assume active, collaborative roles in implementing and monitoring their action plans. Taking responsive action means:

- Dreaming about a better future for student achievement in the school and the community.
- Setting high but realistic goals for academic achievement that can garner the support of both the school staff and community members.
- Drafting action plans based on identified student needs and available community resources.
- Focusing action plans on areas identified as most urgently in need of attention.
- Taking active roles in carrying out parts of the action plan in the community.
- Using action plans to stimulate additional communication, coordination, and collaboration between school and community.
- Developing action plans that are not only responsive (based on identified needs), but also responsible (based on mutual respect and shared agreement).

Step 6. Articulate a Vision and Goals

Once the team has made sense of the data, it is important to articulate a vision for academic achievement. This is a look at the future, a glimpse at what the school and community should be doing to bolster students in their studies next year and five years from now. A vision is a broad statement, an ideal. You may envision that all students who graduate from high school in your community will have the skills necessary to begin a

successful transition to adult life. Goals grow out of this vision. Goals are tangible statements of an attainable ideal. They tell us where we want to go, but not how we are going to get there. In setting a goal, you have not determined how you will allocate resources to meet the goal. Goals form the basis for the action plan, which will be discussed shortly. At this point co-facilitators may want to share a copy of Section Three: How Can Research and Best Practice Help Shape School-Community Action Plans?

Activity: Understand the School and Community Vision for Academic Achievement

The School-Community Engagement Team reflects on the vision for academic achievement. This may include reading vision or mission statements or reviewing annual school goals or improvement plans. A team subcommittee with responsibility for collecting, assembling, and reporting the information may present a written or oral report. These documents and ensuing discussions help define academic achievement and provide preliminary interpretations of what the local school is already doing to increase achievement, particularly through community involvement. Three questions guide this activity:

1. What is our school already doing to promote high levels of academic achievement?
2. How does our school promote learning in the community and incorporate community resources in the school?
3. What more can we do to help students learn in, about, for, and from the community? The team develops a report on the school's current vision for academic achievement and then solicits community input in order to assess whether there are different or richer visions for the school. It is particularly important in this exercise to see how the school's vision for academic achievement can mesh with visions that imagine the school in the broader context of community development. At this point, it is possible to have school officials and other community residents meet to consider alternative visions and to discuss tangible goals, outlined in the activity below.

Activity: Envision the Best of All Possible Worlds

Many people nowadays seem pretty cynical about the "vision thing." Maybe we do live in an age of modest or even falling expectations, but there is nothing wrong with dreaming. Dreaming helps us stretch our imaginations, to wonder if the impossible is possible, and to develop our human potential to its fullest. The pragmatism will come soon enough. For now, let's take our chances and dream, asking questions like these:

- If we had the chance, what would be the best of all possible worlds for academic achievement in our school?
- What is the best we could do in the next year?
- What is the best we could do in the next five years?
- How would the school be different?
- How would the community be different?

This is not an empty exercise. Sometimes you need to dream to see the possibilities that are within your grasp. Dreaming helps you see the possibility for high standards that sometimes are diminished in the face of hard realities of limited budgets, politics, and the everyday rush of just getting things done. After dreaming, it's time to consider goals. Goals help bring the dreamers partway back to earth. When setting goals, there is an effort to balance pragmatism with the dream. You look at the high standard you want and you try to couch it in realistic terms, given the available resources and talents of people in the school and the community. This does not mean that people in the community should look at their resources as fixed. Remember, one of the goals of the school-community engagement team for academic achievement is to build the capacities of both the school and the community, thus expanding available resources.

Goals are measurable statements of attainment for the school and the community. They may be difficult, but they are doable, given the balance between dreams and reality. For example:

- Within five years, we will trim the number of students who graduate from high school and leave our area by five percent.
- Within a year, we will increase student performance on a state-mandated or standardized test in a statistically significant way.
- Within a year, we will establish new courses in entrepreneurship and advanced mathematics in our school.
- Within five years, all of our high school graduates will meet a standard that includes four years of English, four years of math, four years of science, and four years of social studies.
- Within a year, the school will develop agreements with three businesses, one government agency, and one nonprofit organization to place 20 students in one-semester internships of five hours a week to gain work experience. The school will set up a class to be held in conjunction with the internships, and will make every effort to provide preparation and support for the students and the community participants.

Dreaming and goal setting are not the responsibility of the team acting alone. These activities should be done in conjunction with stakeholders from the community. *Every effort should be made to ensure that attendance at these meetings is as representative of the community as possible.* It might be best to hold a series of well-publicized meetings at different times in different places. It is crucial to build broad support for visions and goals before proceeding to action plans.

Activity: Set Short-, Mid-, and Long-range Goals

Your short-range goals should be completed within a few months and could include changes in lesson plans and types of assignments given. A mid-range goal should be completed in six months to a year and could include the addition of a new course. A long-

range goal might take from one to three years to bring to completion, and might involve realigning the school's curriculum to include more community involvement and studies based on community resources.

Putting a realistic time frame on goals is important. Once goals are included in action plans, school stakeholders will be watching closely to see how efforts are going. Setting different time horizons for goals also allows the team, the school, and the community to see immediate successes that can help bolster confidence for longer-run and more complicated projects. It also is important for the team both to be busy and to appear busy and to keep the team's work in the public eye by issuing progress reports on a variety of activities over time. In addition, it is important to review goals periodically to monitor progress and to see if they are still relevant.

Step 7. Develop Action Plans.

Action plans are not something to be done **to** the school or **to** the community but are to be done **with** the school and **with** the community. Action plans are not aimed at individual teachers or community members. Action plans are not developed by a few people working in isolation, but through consultation with the people who will carry them out or are affected by them.

Action plans grow out of the community's vision and provide the roadmap for reaching the community's goals for academic achievement in the school. Taking responsible action means providing regular updates and progress reports to school and community leaders. Using forms, sample plans, and the checklist found in Appendix J, the team reviews its asset map and findings from its research on academic achievement, and revisits its vision and goal statements. Now is the time to see if you can get where you want to go. At their best, action plans do these things:

1. Focus on academic performance in ways that benefit both students and the community.
2. Use education research to determine sound practices for increasing student achievement through adaptations in curriculum, instruction, assessment, career preparation and guidance, and school organization.
3. Depend on clear, specific, and measurable indicators for student performance and school-community collaboration.
4. Meet needs of various school stakeholders and students/families.
5. Include the broader community in helping to educate students.
6. Provide service to the surrounding community in terms of educational opportunities and access to school resources.

Elements of Academic Achievement

In planning to increase academic achievement, it is important to know your targets when developing action plans. As such, you need to understand some key elements of academic achievement, including

1. cultivating high expectations for successful learning for all students, not just those planning to go to college.
2. clearly defining standards for achievement in core subject areas and gaining community understanding about what the new standards mean.
3. providing access to basic resources, such as books, equipment, supplies, and laboratory facilities.
4. encouraging greater parental and community involvement in supporting learning inside and outside the classroom.
5. forging closer links between formal and informal learning experiences within the community.
6. expanding opportunities in professional development that support community members as leaders.
7. making greater use of technology available in the school or community.
8. initiating partnerships with individuals, businesses, and community agencies.
9. developing or select a challenging curriculum that incorporates the community as a resource.
10. implementing instructional practices that require active student processing of ideas and information.
11. using multiple assessment approaches to measure student understanding, reasoning, and problem solving through community input.
12. employing temporary outside help to build local knowledge and skills.
13. using volunteers to link school and community learning opportunities.
14. developing a central community role in supporting academic achievement and assessing student work.
15. promoting the benefit of the local community as a valued place in which to live and work after graduation.
16. helping the community become a better place to live and work.

Activity: Develop An Action Planning Sequence

Now, you're ready to develop an action planning sequence that might look something like this:

1. Choose the top three areas in need of further attention from your school and community.
2. Identify resources, talents, and interests on your team that link to each action area you have selected.

3. Complete the action plan form (Appendix J) to show specific steps the team will take to increase academic achievement through expanded community engagement.

Be realistic when setting up action plans. Look at each goal and determine what is needed to reach that goal. Then, determine what resources in the community can be applied to the action plan. Be aware that implementing change takes time, talent, and energy, but don't let limited resources deter your creativity. Remember that old expression: "Necessity is the mother of invention." It is amazing what people can do with limited resources if they are willing to approach collaboration creatively.

Also, allow time to get school and community feedback on proposed action plans. If you have done your work well in keeping parties informed along the way, the chances for resistance to an action plan are relatively low. If an action plan does upset some people, make sure there is widespread agreement on the plan before pushing on.

Step 8. Implement Action Plans

The action plan is only a **plan**. It is not the **action**. The concrete steps outlined in the action plan must be carried out and reviewed by school-community engagement team members, the school, and stakeholders from the community. Here are some hallmarks of an effective implementation phase:

- multiple strategies aimed at increasing academic achievement
- priorities determined by the team in collaboration with school administrators, faculty and staff, and the broader community
- leveraging of new resources or supports for academic success
- mechanisms for progress reports to the school administration and community stakeholders
- actions that complement and extend existing school goals and objectives
- benefits for the wider community

School-community collaboration for implementing action plans will take various forms from community to community.

Activity: Carry Out a Team Project

Some teams may find it useful to select a team project to strengthen school-community communication, improve capacity for curriculum coordination, and take better advantage of community resources and personal interests. One popular project theme is environmental education. Both the community and the school benefit from the investigations, constructions, and improvements that the school-community team plans for students. Examples of projects include data collection on storm water runoff, waste water treatment,

stream erosion and sedimentation, water quality, nature trails, outdoor learning laboratories, and wildlife sanctuaries. Other partnerships can also put community in the center of the curriculum. In the Young Eagles program, professional aviators who belong to the Experimental Aircraft Association provide instruction in flying. Students apply mathematics and science principles while developing an appreciation for and understanding of local resources and economies.

Phase Four: Evaluating Results

Step 9. Monitor Progress

The action plan includes milestones to be met and indicators of completion or achievement. If progress toward these indicators are not meeting expectations, then plans must be reviewed, revised, or repeated to achieve the desired results. The school-community engagement team should schedule progress review meetings regularly to make mid-course adjustments, if needed. Above all, you should cultivate the long view. Don't expect overnight results. Recognize that it may take several years to get really good at collaboration. Model and encourage patience. Build on your successes, celebrate your achievements, and make sure you share news about your good work with the community.

Activity: Follow Your Progress

To keep your school-community engagement program on track, it is extremely important to review the progress of your work:

1. Review goals regularly. Are they still the right goals? Are there other needs that are more pressing or that must be addressed before you can take action on your initial goal?
2. Identify milestones for achievement up front and stick with them along the way. If "expanding use of community members as classroom resources" or "developing community-based learning projects" are important start-up goals for your school-community engagement effort, then when should they be scheduled and how many people should be involved in them? Identifying numbers of anticipated participants, numbers of anticipated initiatives, and types of cosponsoring organizations may help you determine how you are doing in meeting your goals.
3. Say it with a picture. Chart your progress using time lines or a flow chart so you will know at a glance where you started, where you are right now, and where you expect to be six months or a year from now.

Step 10. Evaluate and Report on the Impact of Your Action Plan

The school-community engagement team may conduct its own internal evaluation of plan effectiveness or employ a third party to review plans and information collected to

provide evidence of results. Some redirection or regrouping may be necessary after careful review and self-reflection.

The team can use both interim and end-of year reports to keep the school board, superintendent, building principal, business partners, other partners, and the wider community informed of progress and problems. Reporting of results and evaluations should be done as part of a public meeting, as well as on paper. Printed reports can be just a few pages long, but should summarize the following:

- background information on what brought the team together
- community engagement indicators you sought to improve and why they are important
- actions you actually took to improve academic achievement
- results, including numbers and statistics
- who was involved in planning and implementing the actions taken
- how you will use the results to recommend further action steps

The paper document you create could include, where possible, photographs, drawings, charts, graphs, maps or other graphic representations to convey important ideas. Having prepared a report for key policymakers, decisionmakers, and partners, you also have another tool for letting the public know about your work.

Activity: Measure Successes

How will you know that your school-community engagement effort has succeeded in improving academic achievement? An important part of determining the effectiveness of your action plan is to count the things that matter. Here are some things you might look for as a result of their action plans:

- How many grade levels have reviewed and clarified achievement standards for each subject area?
- How many subjects or grade levels have selected or developed curriculum materials and activities based on new standards for learning in the core content areas?
- In how many subjects or grade levels can you report more use of student discussion, problem solving, hands-on demonstrations, or other small group work?
- In how many schools, grade levels, or subjects/courses can you report more use of calculators, computers, and telecommunication technologies?
- In how many schools, grade levels, or subjects/courses can you report more use of assessments that measure the ability to reason, solve problems, and apply skills and principles?
- How do grade distributions in the core subject areas compare to grade distributions in the past?
- How has the number of opportunities for teachers to learn new methods of instruction, curriculum development, or assessment increased?
- Have teachers developed or adopted curriculum materials that reflect a community-based curriculum?

- Are teachers working across curriculum boundaries?
- In what new ways are parents and stakeholders involved in discussing academic achievement?
- In what ways is the school a more inviting, welcoming place for visitors?
- Do student assessment tools reflect on input from students, parents, and community members?
- Do students and parents assess student work with teachers?
- How has the number of opportunities for community members to become involved in academic performances increased?
- How has the number of teachers with full certification and qualifications to teach their subjects/grade levels changed?
- How has the number of teachers who belong to racial and ethnic minorities, especially in schools with large minority student populations, changed?
- How has the number of events in which community members participate in learning activities at the school increased?
- How has the number of events in which students and teachers participate in learning activities within the community increased?
- How many and what types of partnerships has the school built with community members, organizations, and businesses?

Step 11. Monitor and Refine the Action Plan

The action plan is intended to improve conditions, resources, and supports for academic achievement in rural schools. It addresses the "next most important thing to do" to strengthen school and community collaboration. In that sense, the action is strategic. But short-term considerations may mean that the action plan cannot be comprehensive enough or thorough enough to include all of the things schools and communities can do to acknowledge, appreciate, and use community resources. There is more work to do in the long run because school reform and improvement are continuous activities. The first action plan gives participants an opportunity to gain experience and expertise in working collaboratively toward common goals. The long-run steps for the School-Community Engagement Team include these:

- integrating successful strategies into existing community structures or networks
- attracting new volunteers (turnover is inevitable)
- community results of actions taken in order to increase awareness of opportunities, gain community acceptance, and promote greater involvement
- charting future directions for funding, operating, and sustaining the team
- regrouping to reevaluate work thus far and to draft a second action plan, adding new elements as needed

*Activity: **Renew Commitments and Action Plans***

- Go back and reevaluate the original list of recommendations for action.
- Think more about what you already know you can do well and expand on it.
- Choose one area that will be a stretch goal (requires developing new knowledge or skill) for your team, the school, and the community.
- Choose one area where you might expand the idea or go from just one school to a district wide focus.
- Build on successes and learn from mistakes.
- Seek additional school and community input based on experiences thus far.
- Continue to look for alternative answers.

Section Three

How Can Research and Best Practice Help Shape School-Community Action Plans?

Section Three
How Can Research and Best Practice Help Shape School-Community Action Plans?

This section of the guide is intended to help School-Community Engagement Team members understand key concepts in promoting academic achievement. The next few pages discuss the climate necessary for high academic achievement; critical elements of academic programs, earning standards, organizing principles for teachers; and hallmarks of good professional development programs for teachers. *Co-facilitators should share this information with team members so that they can build a shared vocabulary and a set of understandings based on current education reform thinking.* Teams can use this knowledge to guide the development of projects and initiatives that will have a lasting impact on learning programs and students.

School-Community Climate for Academic Achievement

Raising the level of academic achievement in a school requires the dedication and energy of school faculty, staff, and students, and the continuing support of the community, especially parents. Successful schools foster academic achievement by providing as many of these qualities as possible:

1. a principal committed to academic excellence
2. dedicated teachers with proper preparation and qualifications
3. a focus that values academic learning as the central purpose of schooling
4. a mission statement that describes intellectual qualities students should develop
5. a curriculum that ensures students are engaged in challenging academic work based on sustained, disciplined, and critical thought
6. rigorous graduation requirements
7. adequate school revenues (annual per-pupil expenditures)
8. adequate learning resources (up-to-date textbooks, equipment, and supplies)
9. adequate teacher salaries
10. teachers emphasize problem-solving skills
11. the availability of alternative ways of learning
12. adequate school facilities (space, lighting, wiring, physical condition of buildings)
13. conducive school climate and students who value learning and support one another (without violent acts, drug and alcohol abuse, vandalism, and persistent disobedience that disrupts academic environment)
14. non-school learning opportunities, including after-school, weekend, or summer programs involving churches, businesses, and youth organizations
15. teaching and learning organized around a core curriculum for all students regardless of personal background or future education plans
16. a rich and varied array of professional development activities for teachers

17. the expectation that all students will achieve high academic standards that are well publicized along with criteria for their assessment
18. the expectation that students devote substantial effort in school work and home work
19. schools intentionally cultivate student attitudes and values; teachers do not view themselves as neutral transmitters of information and skills
20. a deliberate policy of parental and community involvement
21. a community climate that supports and encourages student achievement

All of the qualities listed above suggest that strong academic performance does not occur in a vacuum. Bolstering academic achievement requires developing a joint school-community commitment. This holistic view broadens the responsibility for education and increases the resources available to both the school and the community to improve student performance. In the long run, the school should become stronger, and the community should be a better place to live.

Critical Elements of Academic Programs

High-quality academic programs challenge both teachers and students to continually increase their knowledge and use of content skills and subject matter concepts. Support from the school administration and from the community allows teachers to take advantage of local knowledge and to provide enrichment opportunities for students. Quality school programs include the following elements:

An emphasis on applying knowledge, not just consuming it. Learning is the active investigation of ideas, issues, facts, beliefs, and problems. In strong academic programs, students have opportunities to *do* important reading, writing, mathematics, science, or social studies tasks, not just hear and memorize facts. Students should have opportunities to *do* the following:

- build models, manipulate materials, and represent their learning through products and performances that show what they know
- work in integrative units, extending thematic, interdisciplinary inquiries co-planned with teachers, drawing on knowledge and skills from across the curriculum
- work in small groups (pairs, teams, and panels) some of the time
- apply the studio-apprenticeship method, which involves teacher modeling and coaching, and student choice, responsibility, and exhibition
- talk together about important ideas, principles, and issues
- reflect on and assess their own work, along with goal-setting, and widening the evaluative roles and repertoires of teachers and parents
- develop parallels between schoolwork and what adults do in hobbies, jobs, and life roles
- investigate community issues, setting up a plan to field-test their ideas, then collecting and displaying data

- make generalizations, drawing conclusions based on repeated observations, investigations, and the analysis of trends and patterns in collected data
- use argument and evidence to back up their points of view
- engage ideas through writing and art; explore genres and media of expression as ways of investigating, remembering, and applying information
- have authentic experiences through curriculum-centered ways of bringing life into school and students into the community for research and service

Standards-based curriculum units. It is important to relate learning activities to agreed-upon curriculum standards. Teachers can ask themselves: Will doing the activities in a planned unit help students

- learn important facts and principles?
- practice inquiry skills?
- learn to make and use tools to solve problems?
- reflect on the impact of advancing knowledge on society?

Ongoing in-service opportunities for teachers. Many teachers may not have in-depth knowledge of the subjects they are teaching. Ongoing opportunities to participate in in-service sessions led by practicing professionals, business partners, college or university teachers, consultants, and trainers can help teachers develop stronger foundational knowledge, learn to use new equipment and techniques, and develop a stronger vision for changes needed in local curriculum, instructional strategies, and assessment methods.

Community and administrative support. None of the changes in how students learn content, what content they learn, what materials they work with, or what professional development teachers will receive will occur without involving, including, and informing all stakeholders in the community. School-community engagement team members must work especially hard to ensure that the need for quality learning is understood by the community, takes place within the community, and is sanctioned and encouraged by school-level and district administrators.

Challenging concepts and subject matter. Learning activities enable students to connect their observations and experiences with prior knowledge and to challenge and clarify their understanding of the way a discipline operates.

Learning activities that develop the mental habits of inquiry. These habits include careful observation, curiosity, skepticism, and respect for evidence, including repeated testing and analysis of facts.

Programs accessible to all students. Students from all cultures, ethnic groups, and socioeconomic backgrounds and both genders actively participate in classroom activities. No one is excluded because of language or other discriminating factors.

Appropriate use of technology. Technology is used as a tool for collecting, organizing, displaying, exchanging, and analyzing data.

Integration and continuity among various fields of inquiry and expression. Students experience the interconnectedness of different subjects through planned units, courses, and special programs during the year.

Full-range assessment. Assessment of student learning is clearly spelled out, ongoing, and based on using multiple measures of student progress, including portfolios, peer review, products, performances, open-ended questions, personal conferences with the teacher, parent review, and input from community members with relevant experience.

Learning Standards

The types of mental skills required in the workplace today include critical thinking, problem solving, and creative expression. Increasingly, employers look for students with the ability to perform these seven tasks:

1. organize and use information–know how to locate, access, interpret, and explain to others the essence of a complex concept, problem, or issue
2. consider and choose among alternatives–showing that they can identify several different solutions, strategies, perspectives, or points of view and select a best-fit solution
3. demonstrate understanding of content concepts and skills–through discussion and writing, students show their grasp of important ideas, theories, or perspectives in the content areas
4. apply processes associated with each subject area–conducting inquiry, research, or communication appropriate to the course
5. express themselves through elaborated written communication–providing supporting details in explanations, interpretations, or evaluations about what they are learning
6. investigate problems connected to issues and events beyond the classroom–addressing a concept, problem, or issue in the local community or the world
7. present findings to an audience beyond the school–communicating their knowledge through a product or performance provided to a community group, agency, or partner institution

Strong Practices for Teaching and Learning

The following is a set of organizing principles for challenging academic programs. These eight items represent challenges and dilemmas all classroom teachers face daily.

1. Balance the need to provide breadth (coverage of the curriculum) with depth (demonstration or application of skills through a project or investigation).

2. Find ways for students to explain to each other and to the teacher what they know and can do. The learning is in the talk. The person who does the most talking does the most learning. Use peer tutoring, paired problem solving, drill partners, and cooperative logic problems to get students speaking about their studies. Student learning is enhanced by student teaching.
3. Let students' questions and interests fuel the inquiry. Allow choice in topics for investigation or formats for reporting.
4. Help students produce new knowledge as well as use existing knowledge. Projects and community investigations can provide opportunities for students to collect, organize, display, and analyze data.
5. Recognize that performances require audiences. Help students present to an audience beyond the classroom or the school.
6. Use the community as a learning resource. This helps relate class work to everyday applications and may put students in contact with other adults who actually use on the job what they learned in school.
7. Vary both learning activities and assessment strategies. Blur the distinction between learning and assessing. Use portfolios, peer reviews, products, performances, and open-ended question responses in the assessment mix.
8. Identify ways to use technology appropriately across the curriculum. Teachers who use a variety of technology tools report that technology increases student motivation (and, therefore, receptivity and engagement). It also gives students with different talents a chance to excel, encourages teacher-as-coach approaches, and fosters improved oral and written communication.

Hallmarks of High-Quality Professional Development Programs

The purpose of professional development is to improve student learning through increased knowledge, skill, and problem-solving capacity among educators and other community stakeholders. High-quality professional development is marked by variety and flexibility in duration, intensity, and frequency[3]. Participants should have opportunities to do the following:

- understand both the broad goals and specific objectives of the program
- experience or simulate the roles/tasks for which they are being prepared
- learn about opportunities for continuing education and networking
- use a variety of materials and engage in activities that illustrate key concepts
- work in safe, comfortable environments that promote practice of new skills and application of new tools
- serve as teachers and resources to each other
- build a school learning community–a social system based on mutual respect and trust that fosters lifelong education
- assess their own learning and reflect on program components
- generate new information or commitments that are shared with the whole group

- learn where they can acquire additional knowledge, skills, resources, and support
- exercise choices in determining individual or team learning needs
- develop new insights about themselves, their team, or their organization
- create practical products, clearer understandings, and usable plans related to the work back home
- achieve a stronger sense of how groups performing different roles can contribute to a common purpose
- identify relationships among different system components that have an effect on the implementation of proposed changes or plans
- discover where and how to obtain resource materials (handbooks, guides, references, diagnostics, self-assessments, tools, plans, etc.)
- practice responding to persons who may threaten or attack another role group
- receive public recognition (certificate, award, credit, etc.) for attendance and participation
- desire to learn even more about the content and skills of their disciplines

Section Four

Bibliography and Selected Resources

Section Four
Bibliography and Selected Resources

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Selected Resources
Organizations

Alliance for Parental Involvement in Education, Inc.
Seth Rockmuller
P.O. Box 59
East Chatham, NY 12060-0059
Telephone: 518-392-6900
E-mail: allpiesr@aol.com

The Alliance for Parental Involvement in Education (ALLPIE) is a parent network helping parents explore educational options, including public, private, and home schooling. In addition to a newsletter, ALLPIE publishes pamphlets on educational options and parents rights. The organization sponsors workshops, retreats, and an annual family conference. Educational books and additional materials are available through ALLPIE's mail order lending library and through its catalog.

The Center for the Study of Parent Involvement
John F. Kennedy University
370 Camino Pablo
Orinda, CA 94563
Telephone: 510-254-0110

The Center for the Study of Parent Involvement (CSPI) is a clearinghouse dedicated to bridging the gap between home and school by providing information on parent involvement to school districts, parent and community organizations, students, practitioners, and state and national education agencies. CSPI conducts research; provides training and consultation to educators, parent leaders, and administrators; and sponsors conferences at which parents and educators share ideas and experiences. CSPI publishes a newsletter that cites outstanding parent involvement programs and reviews books and articles on parent involvement.

Center for a New American Dream
6930 Carroll Ave., Suite 900
Takoma Park, MD 20912
Telephone: 301-891-ENUF (3683)
Fax: 301-891-3684
Internet: http://www.newdream.org/

The Center for a New American Dream is a private, not-for-profit organization dedicated to reducing and shifting North American consumption while fostering opportunities for people to lead more secure and fulfilling lives. The organization helps individuals, communities, and businesses establish sustainable practices that will ensure a

healthy planet for future generations. The Center was founded in 1997 on the principle that a highly materialistic definition of the American dream is undermining our families, communities, and the natural world. The Center serves as a hub for numerous local and national organizations promoting cultural, behavioral, industrial, and spiritual changes. It distributes educational materials and conducts campaigns to help individuals make constructive changes within their homes, schools, workplaces, and communities.

Center On School, Family, and Community Partnerships
Joyce L. Epstein, Director
Johns Hopkins University
3003 N. Charles St., Suite 200
Baltimore, MD 21218
Telephone: 410-516-8800
Internet: http://www.csos.jhu.edu/p2000/center.htm

Located at Johns Hopkins University, the Center is designed to help schools develop and maintain strong school, family, and community partnerships. It maintains a variety of resources, including videos and guides to assist individual schools and communities.

Education for Parents of Indian Children with Special Needs
P.O. Box 788
Bernalillo, NM 87004
Telephone: 505-867-3396
Toll Free (parents only): 800-765-7429

The Education for Parents of Indian Children with Special Needs (EPICS) Project is a national parent training and information center for American Indian families with special needs children. Training focuses on helping parents become more involved with their child's educational program. EPICS also offers grants to parent groups across the country interested in supporting and training Native American parents, or professionals and educators who work with Native American families.

Families and Work Institute
330 Seventh Avenue
New York, NY 10001
Telephone: 212-465-2044
Fax: 212-465-8637
Internet: http://www.familiesandworkinst.org/

This national nonprofit research, strategic planning, and consulting organization conducts policy and worksite research on the changing workforce and changing family/personal lives.

The Web site includes announcements from the Families and Work Institute; a description of current research projects, including the Fatherhood Project; a publications list with detailed summaries; and links to other work and family sites.

Family Education Network
20 Park Plaza, Suite 1215
Boston, MA 02116
Telephone: 617-542-6500
Fax: 617-542-6564
E-Mail: support@familyeducation.com
Internet: http://www.familyeducation.com

Founded in 1990, the Family Education Network aims to help parents get more involved in their children's education—and in turn, help their children succeed both in school and in life. The network is a nonpartisan organization dedicated to providing parents unbiased, practical information through publications like *Education Today* and through the use of e-mail and the Internet. It provides a combination of news, resources, information exchange, legislative tracking, health resources, and other educational tools.

National Community Education Association
3929 Old Lee Highway, Suite 91
Fairfax, VA 22030
Telephone: 703-359-8973
Fax: 703-359-0972
E-Mail: ncea@ncea.com
Internet: http://www.idsonline.com/ncea/

The NCEA's purpose is to promote parent and community involvement in public education; form community partnerships to address community needs; and expand lifelong learning opportunities for community residents of all ages and educational backgrounds. The association provides membership services including training through workshops and conferences, technical assistance to state associations and local school districts; a monthly newsletter and a quarterly journal, and governmental and public relations services.

National Network of Partnership Schools
Joyce Epstein
Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships
3003 North Charles St., Suite 200
Baltimore, MD 21218
Internet: http://scov.csos.jhu.edu/p2000

The National Network of Partnership Schools was established in 1996 at Johns Hopkins University by the Center on School, Family, and Community Partnerships. The goal

is to bring together schools, districts, and states that are committed to developing and maintaining strong school-family-community partnerships. There is no fee to join the Network, but schools, districts, and states must meet a few requirements.

The National Parent Teacher Association
330 N. Wabash Avenue, Suite 2100
Chicago, IL 60611-3690
Telephone: 312-670-6782
Fax: 312-670-6783
Internet: http://www.pta.org

The National PTA is a volunteer association seeking to unite home, school, and community in promoting the education, health, and safety of children. Most members are parents, but also included are teachers, school administrators, students, and others interested in the well-being of children. The National PTA, in cooperation with the Johnson Foundation, sponsored the National Parent Involvement Summit with the purpose of strengthening its efforts to further parent/family involvement in the education of children through total community commitment.

National Senior Service Corps
Helen Alston
National Senior Service Corps
Corporation for National and Community Service
1201 New York Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20525
Phone: 202-606-5000, Ext.189
Toll Free: 800-424-8867

The National Senior Service Corps is a federally supported program that helps seniors (men and women 55 years of age and older) find opportunities for service in their home communities. Of particular interest to parents is the Foster Grandparent Program, in which seniors provide emotional support to children who have been abused and neglected; care for infants born prematurely; care for children with physical disabilities; and mentoring for troubled teens and young mothers.

New Parents Network
P.O. Box 436
Agoura Hills, CA 91376-0436
Telephone: 818-889-4604v
Fax: 818-889-9327
E-Mail: moreinfo@npn.org

The New Parents Network (NPN) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1988. The NPN provides information through kiosks located in public places to reach individuals who do not have computers with modems in their homes.

The NPN is designed to provide information to new parents and professionals who work with parents through kiosks in maternity wards, county health departments, universities, public schools, libraries, and government agencies. Information available at the kiosks is organized into the following categories: Child Care & Education, Diseases & Disabilities, General Parenting Information, Health & Nutrition, Media & Publications, Pregnancy & Childbirth, Product Recall Information, Safety & Poison Control, and Support Information.

Parent Action
Rosalie Streett
#2 North Charles St., Suite 960
Baltimore, MD 21201
Telephone: 410-727-3687
Fax: 410-752-1793

Parent Action is a national grassroots membership organization for parents, grandparents, and others who have joined together to form a national voice through which parents can address their unique interests. The organization, which believes that parents need more time, money, services and social respect, works to improve the quality of life for families by ensuring that government, communities, and workplaces have policies and services that support the role of parents. Parent Action advocates on behalf of parents, provides programs and materials that teach self-advocacy, and encourages the formation of local networks for mutual support.

Parent Information Center
Central Office
P.O. Box 2405
Concord, NH 03302-2405
V/TDD: 603-224-7005
Fax: 603-224-4365
Email: picnh@aol.com

The Parent Information Center (PIC) was funded in 1976 by the U.S. Department of Education to provide information, referral, training, and support to parents of children with disabilities. PIC services are available to all parents and family members, whether or not they have a child with a disability.

The Parent Leadership Project
The City University of New York
899 Tenth Ave., Room 410
New York, NY 10019
Telephone: 212-237-8425

Created in 1988, the Parent Leadership Project is designed to provide support for parents interested in improving New York City schools and for those interested in fighting

the drug problems in society. The project provides training and assistance to parents who want to become involved leaders in the school and to parents who want to work cooperatively with teachers, administrators, and other parents.

Parents for Public Schools
P.O. Box 12807
Jackson, MS 39236-2807
Telephone: 800-222-1222 or 601-982-1222
Fax: 601-982-0002
E-Mail: PPSChapter@aol.com

Parents for Public Schools (PPS) is a national organization of grassroots chapters dedicated to recruiting students, involving parents, and improving public schools. PPS mobilizes parents to build better public schools and communities. Founded in 1991 in Jackson, MS, the organization has 53 chapters across 20 states.

Parents as Teachers National Center
10176 Corporate Square Drive, Suite 230
St. Louis, MO 63132
Internet: http://www.patnc.org

The Parents as Teachers (PAT) National Center serves parent educators and parents of children from birth to age five. PAT uses a research-based curriculum, providing age-appropriate information to parents on child development and ways to encourage development and learning. PAT has been recognized by the U. S. Congress as an effective program for families and young children. A support system works with parents through personal visits, and group meetings. PAT also provides child development, language, hearing and vision screenings. Programs are located in the United States, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, England, and the West Indies.

Rethinking Schools
1001 E. Keefe Avenue
Milwaukee, WI 53212
Telephone: 414-964-9646 or 800-669-4192
Fax: 414-964-7220
Internet: http://www.rethinkingschools.org/

Rethinking Schools began as a local effort by Milwaukee-area teachers to improve education in their own classrooms and schools but to also help shape reform throughout the public school system in the United States. Since its founding in 1986, it has grown into a nationally prominent publisher of educational materials, with subscribers in all 50 states, all 10 Canadian provinces, and many other countries. Its Web site includes a selection of links to Web sites for educators and activists.

Women's Educational Equity Resource Center
To receive a catalog, contact:
WEEA Education Development Center
55 Chapel Street
Newton, MA 02158-1060
E-Mail: weeapub@edc.org
Internet: http://www.edc.org/CEEC/WEEA

The Women's Educational Equity Act (WEEA) is a federally program dedicated to reducing educational disparity for women and girls. The WEEA Resource Center disseminates high quality materials and services at a reasonable cost to parents, educators, business leaders, and community members.

WEEA's 1996 catalog of gender-free materials is now available, and includes publications developed by WEEA field-based programs, ACI Publishing, the California Department of Education, Free Spirit Publishing, GrayMill Publishing, the Organization for Equal Education of the Sexes, and Sea Press.

Publications cover classroom practice, math and science education, school-to-work issues, violence prevention, teacher preparation/professional development, training resources, technology education, and students with disabilities.

The Betty Phillips Center for Parenthood Education
Dr. Jerold P. Bauch, Director
Box 81, Peabody College
Nashville, TN 37203
Telephone: 615-322-8100
Fax: 615-343-5670

The Betty Phillips Center for Parenthood Education is a research and development unit of Peabody College at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee. The central mission of the Center is the improvement and expansion of parent involvement in the schools. We carry out this mission by developing innovative plans and models that can be adopted by schools, and by providing technical assistance to schools in the areas of planning, implementation, staff development, parent orientation, and evaluation.

Regional Educational Laboratories

Appalachia Educational Laboratory (AEL)
Post Office Box 1348
Charleston, WV 25325-1348
Phone: 304-347-0400 Fax: 304-347-0487
800-624-9120
E-mail: aelinfo@ael.org
Internet: http://www.ael.org

States Served: Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia

Mission: To link the knowledge from research with the wisdom from practice to improve teaching and learning. This is accomplished by working with educators, researchers, policymakers, business leaders, families, students, and others to discover, develop, evaluate, and disseminate innovative services, products, and practices.

Mid-Atlantic Laboratory for Student Success (LSS)
Temple University/Center for Research in Human Development and Education
933 Ritter Annex, 13th St. and Cecil B. Moore Avenue
Philadelphia, PA 19122-6091
Phone: 215-204-3030 Fax: 215-204-5130
800-892-5550
E-Mail: lss@vm.temple.edu
Internet: http://www.temple.edu/LSS

States Served: Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Washington, D.C.

Mission: To build capacity to bring about lasting improvements in the learning of the mid-Atlantic region's increasingly diverse student population. The ultimate goal of the LSS is to establish a system of research, development, and dissemination that connects schools, parents, community agencies, professional groups, and higher education institutions and that gradually expands reform efforts in the region and is part of a high-tech national system for exchanging information.

Mid-continent Regional Educational Laboratory (McREL)
2550 South Parker Road, Suite 500
Aurora, Colorado 80014-1678
Phone: 303-337-0990 Fax: 303-337-3005
E-mail: info@mcrel.org
Internet: http://www.mcrel.org

States Served: Colorado, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota, Wyoming

Mission: McREL is dedicated to making a difference in the quality of education and learning for all through excellence in applied research, product development, and service. In carrying out its mission, McREL works collaboratively with its clients to improve educational policy and practice through the application of knowledge from research, development, and experience.

North Central Regional Educational Laboratory (NCREL)
1900 Spring Road, Suite 300
Oak Brook, Illinois 60523-1480
Phone: 630-571-4700 Fax: 630-571-4716
800-356-2735
E-mail: info@ncrel.org
Internet: http://www.ncrel.org

States Served: Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Minnesota, Ohio, Wisconsin

Mission: To strengthen and support schools and communities so that all students achieve standards of educational excellence. NCREL accomplishes its mission through policy analysis, professional development, and technical assistance, and by leveraging the power of partnerships and networks.

Northeast and Islands Laboratory at Brown University (LAB)
222 Richmond Street, Suite 300
Providence, RI 02903-4226
Phone: 401-274-9548 Fax: 401-421-7650
800-521-9550
E-mail: LAB@brown.edu
Internet: http://www.lab.brown.edu

States Served: Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New York, Rhode Island, Vermont, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands

Mission: To promote systemic school improvement in the Northeast and Islands region by supporting researchers who conduct collaborative inquiry alongside educational practitioners and community members. The LAB places special emphasis on developing effective approaches to meeting the educational needs of linguistically and culturally diverse students. Knowledge gained through inquiries into standards and assessment, school services, professional development, and community involvement is exchanged with policymakers and

schools through publications, computer media, and LAB-facilitated workshops. In all of the LAB's work, equity is the highest priority, reflecting a commitment to helping all learners achieve excellence.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (NWREL)
101 SW Main Street, Suite 500
Portland, OR 97204-3297
Phone: 503-275-9500 Fax: 503-275-9489
E-mail: info@nwrel.org
Internet: http://www.nwrel.org

States Served: Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington

Mission: To improve educational results for children, youth, and adults by providing research and development assistance in delivering equitable, high-quality educational programs. NWREL provides research and development assistance to education, government, community agencies, business and labor.

Pacific Resources for Education and Learning (PREL)
828 Fort Street Mall, Suite 500
Honolulu, HI 96813-4321
Phone: 808-533-6000 Fax: 808-533-7599
E-mail: askprel@prel.hawaii.edu
Internet: http://www.prel.hawaii.edu

Mission: To assist education, government, and labor groups as well as community agencies and businesses in maintaining cultural literacy and improving the quality of life by helping to strengthen educational programs and processes for children, youth, and adults.

SouthEastern Regional Vision for Education (SERVE)
Post Office Box 5367
Greensboro, NC 27435
Phone: 910-334-3211 Fax: 910-334-3268
800-755-3277
E-mail: info@SERVE.org
Internet: http://www.serve.org

States Served: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Mississippi, North Carolina, and South Carolina

Mission: To promote and support the continuous improvement of educational opportunities for all learners in the Southeast.

Southwest Educational Development Laboratory (SEDL)
211 East Seventh Street
Austin, TX 78701-3281
Phone: 512-476-6861 Fax: 512-476-2286
800-476-6861
E-mail: whoover@aedl.org
Internet: http://www.sedl.org

States Served: Arkansas, Louisiana, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas

Mission: To find, share, and sustain effective solutions for the most urgent problems facing educational systems, practitioners, and decision makers in the southwestern United States. SEDL's particular emphasis is on ensuring educational quality for children and youth who live in poverty; who are Hispanic, African American, or other minorities; or who have mental or physical exceptionalities.

WestEd
730 Harrison Street
San Francisco, CA 94107
Phone: 415-565-3000 Fax: 415-565-3012
E-mail: tross@wested.org
Internet: http://www.wested.org

States Served: Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah

Mission: To challenge and enable educators to provide quality learning for all students by applying the best available knowledge from research, development, and experience. In carrying out its mission, WestEd works with clients to develop the tools, processes, and materials that policymakers and practitioners need to put the components of reform together and to scale up successful practice in ways that will improve teaching and learning for a broader range of students.

Appendix A

What the Research Says about Community Engagement

What the Research Says about Community Engagement

A U.S. Department of Education research publication, *Strong Families, Strong Schools* (1994), points out that in our "rapidly changing society, few areas are as essential to a successful future as education, both as a means of learning basic and advanced skills and as a process for helping to develop responsible, compassionate citizens who are ready to make valuable contributions to their family, community, state, and nation" (p. 1).

In this era of limited resources and rising expectations, public schools may find themselves competing for allocations from a shrinking pool of resources. Some constituencies have become more and more reluctant to tax themselves for schools that the public sometimes perceives to be remote and removed from day-to-day living. When only 30 percent of the adult population in a typical community has school-age children, 70 percent of the potential voters may question cost-benefit ratios at tax time and frequently refuse to bear an additional financial burden for the schools (Schmitt & Tracy, 1996).

In an article called "School Reform Versus Reality," Harold Hodgkinson concludes that the question of how schools should be restructured is in reality a two-part question: "What can educators do that they are not already doing . . . to get [children] achieving well in a school setting? And how can educators collaborate more closely with other service providers so that we all work together toward the urgent goal of providing services to the same client?" (p. 16).

The key to answering these questions lies in how society members define "we." As Guthrie and Guthrie (1991) point out, the challenge is not to divide up responsibilities, but to reconceptualize the role of the school and relationships among the school, the family, the community, and the larger society.

An African proverb eloquently sums up the **what** and **why** of collaboration: "It takes a whole village to raise a child." The job of supporting children to achieve in school and in life is too big a task for families, schools, or community institutions to tackle alone. The whole village has to come together to fulfill its collective obligation to nurture and teach its youngest members.

Together, individuals and groups can make a big difference in children's lives. But these are difficult times. Families spend far less time together, and most face an ongoing struggle to balance the demands of personal life with their jobs (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). It is ironic that today's families, while under a great deal of stress to provide "things," seem less likely than ever to have the one "thing" children need most: time. Long work hours, long commutes, and daily chores leave families little time—or energy—to participate in local schools. At the same time, there is a great need for that involvement.

Lack of parental involvement is one of the biggest concerns in education today. This concern, along with a multitude of others, will be resolved only when adults join forces in their communities. Parents and teachers want to do more but are having difficulties arranging the time. For example, two-thirds of employed parents with children under the age of 18 say they do not have enough time for their children (U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p. iv). Many parents say they are willing to spend more time on activities with their children but need more guidance from teachers. Teachers also need more guidance, as very few college and school systems provide new or experienced teachers with coursework in working with families (U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p. iv).

Community Engagement Positively Affects Student Achievement

Research confirms that, regardless of economic, racial, or cultural background, when families are involved as partners in their children's education, the results include improved student achievement, better school attendance, reduced drop-out rates, and decreased delinquency (U.S. Department of Education, 1994).

Thirty years of research confirms that family involvement is a powerful influence on children's achievement in school. When families are involved in education, their children

- earn higher grades
- receive higher scores on tests
- attend school more regularly
- complete more homework
- demonstrate more positive attitudes and behavior
- graduate from high school at higher rates
- are more likely to enroll in higher education than students with less family involvement (U.S. Department of Education, 1994, p. 5)

Listed below are six practical considerations, based on research, for planning and managing community engagement strategies:

1. Thirty-five studies found that the form of parent or community involvement does not seem to be critical, so long as it is reasonably well planned, comprehensive, and long lasting (Henderson and Berla, 1994).
2. Partnerships tend to decline unless schools and teachers work to develop and implement appropriate partnership practices at each grade level.
3. Almost all teachers and administrators would like to involve families, but many do not know how to go about building positive and productive programs and are consequently fearful of trying (Epstein, 1995).
4. Through policies and actions, schools can reach out to parents to help them become involved in the education of their children.

5. While all forms of parent involvement are desirable, home-based parent involvement (doing home-learning activities coordinated with children's class work and providing enrichment activities) appears to be the most valuable in regard to student achievement.
6. Socioeconomic status and lack of education have no effect on the willingness of parents to help their own children (Chrispeels, Fernandez, & Preston, 1991).

Achieving high levels of public participation, approval, and support is not easy. Key strategies appear to involve bringing together representatives from all segments of the community, developing action plans and team projects that improve the life of the local community, and building broad consensus about academic achievement.

Thomas Hatch (1998) writes that "beyond changes in curriculum or improvements in self-esteem, meaningful community engagement sets in motion a chain of events that transforms the culture of the school and, often, the community that the school serves" (p. 16). Writing about patterns among school experiences with community engagement in 32 communities, Hatch reports some important common ingredients contributing to improved test scores:

- improving the physical conditions, resources, and participation of constituent groups around learning
- clarifying and strengthening positive attitudes and expectations among parents, teachers, and students
- expanding the depth and quality of learning experiences in which parents, teachers, and students participate

Where are we today?

David Mathews (1996) says a breakdown of the contract between the public and the public school may be one reason for the more obvious problems: dissatisfaction with the performance of the school, difficulties in communication between administrators and the public, and a lack of citizen participation. While these are all serious concerns, a deterioration of citizens' commitment to public education would call for more than improving test scores, doing a better job of communicating, or making the type of superficial gestures usually implied by "engaging the public." Mathews (1996) offers these observations about the current contact between the public and public schools:

- Citizens complain that educators are preoccupied with their own agendas and don't address public concerns.
- The lack of concern convinces people that the public schools aren't theirs.
- The relationship citizens have or don't have with schools seems to affect the way they view them.
- People reason that if schools can't help individuals, they certainly can't help the larger community.

- Some schools don't have strong communities to relate to in the first place.
- With the web of problems affecting education, creating a community that can pull together poses a substantial challenge.
- Educators frequently equate the public with parents. And, while involving parents is essential, they are only a third of the citizenry.

In light of these conditions, it's no wonder that those trying to change schools sometimes give what one reporter describes as lip service to public involvement. It's no wonder that reforms often fail, divided within by disputes between educators and other key actors and besieged without by angry interest groups (Farkas, S., with Johnson, J., 1993). It's no wonder
that when educators talk about public engagement or community involvement, all they mean is using more effective ways of telling people what's good for them.

Community engagement for improved academic achievement means bringing together diverse groups of people for conversation and action planning. According to the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (1998), some hallmarks of healthy community engagement include

- two-way conversations–talking with people, not just at them
- a clear focus, sustained over time
- repeated opportunities for teachers, administrators, parents, community members, and resource partners to think about challenges and opportunities facing their schools
- learning by the community, in the community, and with the community

Achieving high levels of public participation, approval, and support is not easy. Key strategies appear to involve

- bringing together representatives from all segments of the community
- developing action plans and team projects that improve the life of the local community
- building broad consensus about what makes for strong academic programs and standards

Joyce Epstein (1995), an educational researcher specializing in family and community involvement in schools, says there are many reasons for developing school, family, and community partnerships. These partnerships can improve school programs and school climate, provide families services and support, increase parents' skills and leadership with others in the community, and help teachers with their work. But the main reason to create partnerships is to help all youngsters succeed in school and in later life. When parents, teachers, students, and others view one another as partners in education, a caring community forms around students, and their chances for success increase.

School board members and school administrators say the main benefit of stronger ties with families and communities is increased academic achievement by students. Parent and community partnerships can help to boost achievement from preschool through high school. Involved parents and the community will be more likely to support school reform efforts (Center on Families, Communities, and Schools & Children, 1996).

Appendix B

Dealing with Change and Disagreements

Dealing with Change and Disagreements

Many people in rural areas feel overwhelmed by changes that have occurred in their communities. Sometimes, they feel helpless to do anything about the shifts in economics, population, employment, or even demands made by federal or state mandates in education. Changes in state curriculum standards, testing systems, teacher licensure, tenured teacher evaluation, and professional development requirements can be viewed more as burdens to be endured than as opportunities to be embraced. This is why community dialogue is so important in understanding the real meaning of new demands on our local schools. Curriculum frameworks may be guidelines, not rigid requirements that can be met in only one way. State learning standards may represent some competencies that rural communities prize highly, but these standards may not go far enough—they may not include standards that local people consider important. Through community dialogue, joint planning, and collaborative action, both educators and community members can examine and apply their curriculum in ways that exceed state requirements. Schools and communities may exercise considerable flexibility in determining how to do this.

Building openness and trust may help bridge some of the difficulties rural communities face in educating their children. The effort requires finding agreed-upon values of the community and school officials and using those values to improve the lives of school children. To emphasize again: this is a two-way process. For school officials, building openness and trust is first a matter of being willing to change the way things have been done by opening up processes that normally have gone on behind closed doors, making those processes collaborative. It is also a matter of understanding different and sometimes conflicting community values about what constitutes a good school and how to increase academic achievement.

For community members, the process of conversation and collaboration demands that they develop an understanding of the school and how it works. Both citizens and educators must become open to changing their perceptions about education. There may be disagreements along the way, but ultimately, both citizens and school officials have to emphasize values that focus on the good of the children, channeling that energy to bring about positive experiences and using the energy created by those positive experiences to help overcome and modify negative values that stand in the way of improved academic achievement.

Change is likely to be stressful; it seems to heighten tensions and disagreements. Most of the time, we tend to avoid disagreements because we don't like confrontation. But differences in opinion do not have to be a problem. Our *reaction* to disagreement is what usually causes difficulties. We can use our differences in positive ways to clarify points of view and to find common ground for mediating issues and moving forward.

Different ways of thinking may be difficult to understand, at least at the outset. It is important to be able to analyze differences and decide when and how it is appropriate to

make efforts to manage or resolve divisions. Doing this requires listening carefully to community members, caring about them as individuals, and understanding sources of disagreements, such as these:

- **Clashes of beliefs.** Sometimes people hold different, deep-seated beliefs or values. What one person holds dear may mean little or nothing to someone else.
- **Disagreement over goals or strategies.** Individuals may have reasonable differences over goals for an organization or project. Or they may disagree on strategies for implementing those goals.
- **Poor communications.** Maybe someone didn't hear what another person said. Maybe the listener misunderstood what was said. Maybe the person talking didn't make the point clear.
- **Distribution of money or power.** Both of these are gut issues. People often don't like to share money or power and don't like their positions challenged. They don't want to lose what they have. On the other hand, there are people who think the existing order of money or power is unfair and believe more people should share in money or power. Or, people may question a proposed distribution of money or power.
- **Personality clashes.** Sometimes people just don't get along with one another. One person may try to dominate or take control of a situation. Others may resist this. One person may need to take time to reflect, while someone else wants a quick decision.
- **Threats to self-esteem or lack of respect.** People like to feel important and detest it when someone fails to respect the basic qualities that make us human.
- **Pressures at work or home.** We all live with and manage a variety of responsibilities, but sometimes these get us down. Our own stress and anxiety can cause us to create tense moments with others.

Trying to bridge differences can be risky, but our response determines whether we can use our differences productively. At worst, disagreements can be divisive and destructive. This is unproductive. Our goal is to make the process of working out our differences productive, seeking a win-win situation. At best, we compromise. Everyone involved gives up a little bit and maybe gains a little bit. Or, one party in the conflict volunteers to accept the other party's position entirely. Sometimes, we agree to disagree, but continue to work together because of our hopes for a better life in our school and community.

Appendix C

School Readiness for Community Engagement: An Inventory

School Readiness for Community Engagement: An Inventory
Directions

The School Readiness for Community Engagement Inventory has two purposes. First, it is intended to give school administrators a rough idea of how strong their school engagement with community members is at the present. Second, it is intended to provoke thought. It should give administrators an idea of whether they really want to become involved (or more involved) in community engagement efforts. In addition, the inventory is a list of ideas for community engagement. If the intent is to broaden the school community engagement, these items might prompt some ideas for new approaches.

The instrument is divided into four parts: Family, Community, School, and Community Engagement Concerns. Each section has a brief set of directions for completion. On completion of the indicators, the principal can review the results, and identify strengths and weaknesses in community engagement. Based on these identified strengths and weaknesses, the leadership of the school can adjust or adapt their present engagement policy if necessary.

The School Readiness for Community Engagement Inventory can help set benchmarks to gauge the readiness of the school to involve the community. This self-assessment can be filled out by the principal, or the principal may choose to involve other staff members.

This inventory is in no way useful for making school-to-school comparisons.

Before completing the following inventory, please describe your current approach to community engagement (involvement) in your school.

Section I: ***Family***

PART A: *Please check* ***yes*** *or* ***no*** *for each of the following items. Please respond to each statement with regard to current practices at your school.*

		Yes	No
1.	Parents seem to feel at home in the school.	☐	☐
2.	Parents visit/work in the classroom.	☐	☐
3.	Parents are not only encouraged to volunteer in school but are also recognized for their service.	☐	☐
4.	The school provides decision-making training for all parents involved in making decisions.	☐	☐
5.	Policy alternatives are presented to parents as part of a community meeting.	☐	☐
6.	Planning alternatives are presented to parents as part of a community meeting.	☐	☐
7.	The school's mission statement is shared with local businesses.	☐	☐
8.	There is a high rate of parent attendance at school meetings/conferences on academic matters.	☐	☐
9.	There is a high rate of parent attendance at nonacademic school functions.	☐	☐
10.	The schedule of conferences and other events has been altered to meet the needs of working parents.	☐	☐
11.	The school welcomes active participation of parents in helping children make efforts to achieve.	☐	☐
12.	The school recruits parents to be actively involved in educating students.	☐	☐
13.	The school involves parents as volunteers to assist students who are struggling academically.	☐	☐
14.	The school conducts workshops to teach parents how to assist with their child's education.	☐	☐

		Yes	No
15.	The school has developed a home-school collaboration in which parents are partners in education.	☐	☐
16.	The school provides an open forum for parents to provide input on issues.	☐	☐
17.	The school invests time in parent and adult education.	☐	☐
18.	Parent suggestions are carefully weighed, considered, and implemented.	☐	☐
19.	Home-school communication is a top priority of the school.	☐	☐
20.	Parents of all new students are invited to an informal get-acquainted meeting.	☐	☐
21.	Parents and teachers have an opportunity to discuss problems.	☐	☐
22.	Parents and the administration have an opportunity to discuss problems.	☐	☐
23.	The school welcomes active participation from parents in helping children make efforts to achieve.	☐	☐

PART B

The following items assess the extent to which parents have influence in education decisions. Please respond to each item on a five-point scale ranging from (1 has no influence at all) to (5 usually has decisive influence). Circle the number that best represents the influence parents have in your school.

		No Influence				Decisive Influence
24.	Selecting required textbooks.	1	2	3	4	5
25.	Selecting supplementary materials.	1	2	3	4	5
26.	Establishing course objectives.	1	2	3	4	5
27.	Determining the curriculum.	1	2	3	4	5
28.	Hiring new teachers.	1	2	3	4	5

		No Influence				Decisive Influence
29.	Establishing policy and procedures for evaluating teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
30.	Establishing the grading policies.	1	2	3	4	5
31.	Establishing student disciplinary policies.	1	2	3	4	5
32.	Determining budget allocation.	1	2	3	4	5
33.	Setting academic standards.	1	2	3	4	5
34.	Evaluating academic standards.	1	2	3	4	5

Section II: ***Community***

Please check yes or no for each of the following items. Please respond to each statement with regard to current practices at your school and in your community.

		Yes	No
1.	Local business leaders are involved in the classroom.	☐	☐
2.	Local board meetings are used to recognize business leaders who help the school.	☐	☐
3.	Local business groups are encouraged to participate with the school.	☐	☐
4.	The school's mission statement is shared with business.	☐	☐
5.	The school seeks input from businesses on skills and knowledge that may prepare students for the workplace.	☐	☐
6.	The school encourages businesses to consider flexible work schedules for employees who are parents so they can attend conferences and other events at their children's schools.	☐	☐
7.	The school maintains relationships with local businesses that are productive for students.	☐	☐
8.	The school actively seeks opportunities to use local businesses as part of its curriculum.	☐	☐

		Yes	No
9.	Local businesses provide students with sites for work experience.	☐	☐
10.	Local businesses help provide career guidance/counseling.	☐	☐
11.	School staff support local businesses.	☐	☐
12.	The school forms partnerships with businesses for civic improvement.	☐	☐
13.	Community members are encouraged to visit the school.	☐	☐
14.	Community members contribute to decisions made at the school.	☐	☐
15.	The community discusses instructional issues, such as improving teaching.	☐	☐
16.	The community has a role in formulating and assessing the mission of the school.	☐	☐

Section III: ***School***

Please check ***yes*** *or* ***no*** *for each of the following items. Please respond to each statement with regard to current practices at your school.*

		Yes	No
1.	The school encourages the formation of community coalitions of business leaders, parents, community organizations, and other stakeholders to be involved in total education improvement efforts.	☐	☐
2.	School staff members are active in community affairs.	☐	☐
3.	The school has evening activities or programs involving the entire community.	☐	☐
4.	The school permits outside organizations to conduct community activities in the school building.	☐	☐
5.	The school has a written, board-approved policy on school-community involvement.	☐	☐

		Yes	No
6.	The school has a formal improvement action plan that includes parent and community involvement strategies.	☐	☐
7.	The school has a staff person responsible for parent-community involvement activities.	☐	☐
8.	Efforts are made to involve all school employees in community engagement.	☐	☐
9.	The school has identified various aspects of community relationships that enhance school quality.	☐	☐
10.	The school has issued a report card to provide information on various aspects of the school's program.	☐	☐
11.	The school values community members by celebrating major events in their careers and lives.	☐	☐
12.	Faculty and staff members have friendships with members of the community.	☐	☐
13.	The principal encourages an open-door policy for face-to-face communications with community members.	☐	☐
14.	The school office has friendly and helpful personnel.	☐	☐
15.	The school encourages questions, problem identification and problem solving by people affected by the system.	☐	☐
16.	An effort to gather broad community data is used in establishing the school goals and objectives.	☐	☐
17.	The school actively seeks community input as to how well it's doing.	☐	☐
18.	The school is open to activities conducted by the community.	☐	☐
19.	The Learning Resource Center or library is designed with the community clearly in mind.	☐	☐

Please respond to each of the following items using the scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). Circle the number that represents the extent to which you agree or disagree with each statement.

		Strongly Disagree				Strongly Agree
1.	In the last 15 years or so, there has been a history of disagreement about school policies in the community.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	There are times when disagreement about school policy is healthy.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Community involvement is essential to bridging differences in opinion about school policy.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Leadership in the community can come from unexpected places.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	The community has been supportive of school policies.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Community groups have been instrumental in helping to raise funds for school needs.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Openness and trust between the school and the community is encouraged.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	The school conducts a continuous information program for the community.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	The school uses community members (e.g., parents, business persons) to help students understand the role of academics in the workplace.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	The school engages community and business in helping teachers, students, and parents understand the need for high-quality knowledge and skills.	1	2	3	4	5

Section IV: ***Community Engagement Concerns***

On a scale of 1 (not a concern) to 5 (very much a concern), please rate the extent to which these issues would be of concern to someone launching a community engagement effort. Circle the number that best represents your concern.

		Not a concern				Very much a concern
1.	Parents' lack of interest in being involved.	1	2	3	4	5
2.	Staff lack of interest in involving parents.	1	2	3	4	5
3.	Staff attitudes toward parents that discourage parent involvement.	1	2	3	4	5
4.	Communicating with parents.	1	2	3	4	5
5.	Finding good ideas others have used to get parents involved.	1	2	3	4	5
6.	Making parents understand they are welcome at school.	1	2	3	4	5
7.	Motivating parents to get involved.	1	2	3	4	5
8.	Preventing parent involvement from becoming parent interference.	1	2	3	4	5
9.	Encouraging parents to help children learn at home.	1	2	3	4	5
10.	Finding ways to use parents as learning resources for our school.	1	2	3	4	5
11.	Finding adequate funding to support parent involvement efforts.	1	2	3	4	5
12.	Getting information home to parents.	1	2	3	4	5
13.	Reaching hard-to-reach parents.	1	2	3	4	5
14.	Surveying parents to learn their attitudes and concerns.	1	2	3	4	5
15.	Convincing parents that schools truly care about them and want to help their children.	1	2	3	4	5

		Not a concern				Very much a concern
16.	Helping parent groups succeed.	1	2	3	4	5
17.	Teaching parenting skills.	1	2	3	4	5
18.	The changing structure of the family.	1	2	3	4	5
19.	Getting parents to understand that they are their children's first and most influential teachers.	1	2	3	4	5
20.	Building a feeling of home-school teamwork.	1	2	3	4	5
21.	Parents lack time to devote to school.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix D

Community Engagement Team Roster

Community Engagement Team Roster

Directions: Once the team is identified, use the Community Engagement Team Roster to record vital contact information for all team members. Make sure each team member gets a copy of the completed roster so that it's easy for team members to contact one another. This roster can be updated as team members are added or leave.

Name _____ Street _____ City, State, Zip _____ Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____ Fax _____ E-mail _____ Representing _____	Name _____ Street _____ City, State, Zip _____ Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____ Fax _____ E-mail _____ Representing _____
Name _____ Street _____ City, State, Zip _____ Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____ Fax _____ E-mail _____ Representing _____	Name _____ Street _____ City, State, Zip _____ Home Phone _____ Work Phone _____ Fax _____ E-mail _____ Representing _____

Appendix E

Co-facilitators: Rationale and Role

Community Engagement Team Planning Sheet

Co-facilitators: Rationale and Role

Facilitators play an important role in keeping teams focused and active. Instead of having just one facilitator, however it is often beneficial to select co-facilitators, for the following reasons:

- more information and ideas are available during planning.
- more energy (physical and emotional) is available to the group, especially during times of disagreement or when handling complicated matters.
- if one co-facilitator becomes personally involved in discussion, it is easy to hand the job over to the other co-facilitator for the time being.
- more people gain experience and skill as facilitators.
- sharing the responsibility makes it less exhausting, demanding, and intimidating.

Co-facilitators can be extremely helpful to one another. For people who are not used to working with another facilitator, it is probably wise to divide responsibilities for the agenda before the meeting. But being a co-facilitator means that the person who is not currently on duty is still responsible for paying attention to the team's mood and helping to clarify issues, test for consensus, etc. In evaluating their work together, co-facilitators can also help each other by giving feedback and support, thus providing opportunities for growth.

Competencies to be considered in selecting co-facilitators include these:

- ability to distinguish process from content
- ability to work closely with others
- management of the participant relationship and thorough preparation
- wise use of time and space
- skill in evoking participation and creativity
- capability to maintain fairness
- skill in reading group dynamics
- adaptability to change
- willingness to share responsibility for the group's journey
- maintain integrity

It probably would take a perfect world to find one person possessing all these competencies—and many more could be added. But co-facilitators should have at least some of these attributes. Consider those who are willing, have the time, and believe in what the group has to accomplish.

Specific Tasks

Co-facilitators have specific tasks that are vital to the functioning of the school-community engagement team:

1. **Help develop the agenda.** Arrange before the meeting to have somebody present background information on each item, if appropriate. Make sure the agenda is put in writing or in a handout for all to see.
2. **Set up the room.** If possible, arrange in a U-shape with the flip charts or blackboard at the open end of the U. If possible, keep the chairs only one person deep.
3. **Introduce yourself.** Then begin introductions all around. (Make your own "cheat sheet" of who sits where.)
4. **Make sure there is a timekeeper and a note taker**. Don't let the meeting start without them. Give specific instructions, such as: "Timekeeper, use hand signals to let me know when half the time is gone, when only a minute is left, and when we are out of time." "Note taker, please record decisions only."
5. **Review the agenda and ground rules**. Get agreement before proceeding. This will be the group's first consensus agreement.
6. **Keep the group and speakers focused**. It is important to stay on the agenda and on the task at hand, with an eye toward the larger objective of what the team needs to accomplish.
7. **Record team members' comments**. Use the flip chart, blackboard or pieces of butcher paper. Call on the skills of the note taker to help, if desired.
8. **Protect the process**. Enforce ground rules and time allotments. Co-facilitators are responsible for encouraging discussion, but they must protect diverse ideas and individuals from attack, suggesting processes for following the agenda and devising other approaches if the process bogs down. They should not be afraid of asking for outside help, if needed.
9. **Encourage the expression of various viewpoints**. The more important the discussion, the more important it is to have all pertinent information (facts, feelings, and opinions) on the table. Call on people who haven't spoken much to let them address the issue. Notice who is confused, agitated, or unhappy with the debate, and ask the person to address the issue.
10. **Limit discussions between two people.** Ask for comments from others in the group. It is the group that needs to make decisions and carry them out. One of the easier ways to do this is to keep the order in which hands are raised or ask who else would like to speak and then proceed with the other speakers.
11. **Hold people to speaking for themselves**. Don't let them make vague references to others. For example, discourage phrases like: "Some people say...." "We all know...." "They would not listen...." Even though this is difficult at the beginning, it will foster trust in the long run.

12. **Help the group make decisions**. Keep looking for points of agreement and state them. It helps morale. Encourage people to think of fresh solutions, as well as to look for possible compromises. When you test for consensus, state in question form everything that you feel participants agree on. Be specific: "Do we agree that we'll meet on Tuesday evenings for the next two months and that a facilitator will be found at each meeting to function for the next one?" not "Do we all agree that we should do it the way it was just suggested?"
13. **Make the group deal with going beyond the allotted time limit for an agenda item**. Where will the additional time come from? What agenda item should have less time? Or does the group agree to adjourn later than planned? Be careful about this because it can sometimes take more time to argue over time than it would have taken to resolve the issue. It is wise for the co-facilitators to be flexible about time, especially if a decision is about to be made. If it is obvious that a decision will not be made in time, bring this before the group as soon as possible so they can spend the last five minutes deciding when and how they will finish addressing the agenda item. If you wait until time is up to begin discussing whether to continue or postpone discussion, you take time from later agenda items.
14. **Focus on closure**. Insist that discussions be resolved with the identification of appropriate next steps and that those agreements and decisions are suitably identified and recorded.
15. **Make sure the next meeting is scheduled**. It is much easier to schedule the next meeting when everyone is present. Allow time for it on the agenda, and insist that people consider it.
16. **Try to ensure that the next agenda-making team is identified**. That way, everyone knows who to contact to offer input or committee items for the agenda.
17. **Use humor to alleviate tension**. When intense situations arise, or when solutions are hard to reach, remember to use humor, affirmation, quick games for energy, changing places, small buzz groups, silence, etc.
18. **Remain neutral**. If you find yourself drawn into discussion in support of a particular position, it is preferable to step aside as facilitator until the next agenda item. This can be arranged beforehand if you expect a conflict of interest.
19. **Take regular breaks**. Almost any meeting will benefit from quick breaks in the proceedings–energy injections–provided by short games, songs, a common stretch, etc. Be open to the group's overall mood, and don't take too much time asking for consensus on a quick break. Just say, "OK, I want everyone to stand up for a minute and stretch, and then we will sit down."
20. **Make it clear who has committed to what during the meeting**. Ask the note taker to repeat back what each person said he or she would do either right after the decision or at the end of the meeting. Another practical technique is to give a card to each person who commits to doing something. At the meeting, ask everyone to show their cards, and remind them to write their commitment down.

Community Engagement Team Planning Sheet
Directions

The Community Engagement Team Planning Sheet is divided into three components: Studying the Situation, Developing an Action Plan, and Implementing the Action Plan. Community Engagement Team, Develop An Action Plan, and Implementation of Action Plan.

The **Studying the Situation** component is an immediate team activity. (The information should be collected from the school and will provide the foundation from which the team can take the next step, the development of an action plan). The form provides a space for the date of completion as well as a brief description of the information obtained.

The **Developing Action Plan** section provides a step-by-step set of directions for using available resources to determine the who, what, and when of the action plan. Space is provided for recording the completion date of each step.

The **Implementing The Action Plan** section provides guidelines for active community involvement and the opportunity to review progress. As portions of the plan are completed, opportunities are provided for considering new priorities.

Community Engagement Team
Planning Sheet

Studying	Project Completion Date
1. Obtained and reviewed community engagement section of the school's improvement (transformation) plan.	
2. Reviewed current information on academic achievement of students at the school	
3. Identified current community activities supporting student academic achievement	
4. Developed a profile of community activities that support student achievement at school	
5. Identified resource agencies working with (in) the school to improve academic achievement	

Developing An Action Plan	Project Completion Date
1. Completed Community Self-Assessment Profile	
2. Developed action plan based on profile	
3. Set priorities in action plan	
4. Identified community resources available to implement action plan	
5. Identified role and responsibility of community engagement team members	
6. Developed time lines for action plan implementation	

Implementing Action Plan	Projected Completion Date
1. Accessed community resources	
2. Connected with the technical assistance partners	
3. Involved all team members in planning implementation	
4. Solicited broad-based community participation	
5. Conducted periodic self-assessment to measure progress and achievements	

Appendix F

Community Profile

Community Profile

The Community Engagement Self-Assessment Profile may not ask for all of the information the School-Community Engagement Team might want, but it will provide guidance on the type of information the team might seek. The information collected from various sources listed next to each item will provide team members with the same foundation and community information.

Census data can be found on the Web at: http://www.census.gov.county. The demographic information can also be assembled from school system data, county development authority data, public and private agencies, churches, businesses, and other community agencies.

In defining the community, consideration should be given to such things as geographic area, school district boundaries, natural divisions, surveyed areas, or other entities that determine what the team considers to be "the community."

Population (U.S. Census)_____

Household Type and Presence and Age of Children (U.S. Census)_____

_____

School Enrollment and Type of School (school records)_____

_____

Educational Attainment (U.S. Census)_____

Industries (phone book, chamber of commerce)_____

Types of Businesses (phone book, chamber of commerce)_____

_____

Occupations (U.S. Census, chamber of commerce)_____

_____

Median Household Income (U.S. Census, state data center)_____

Civic Organizations (phone book, community contacts)_____

Churches/Religious Organizations (phone book, community contacts)_____

_____

Education-related organizations (phone book, community contacts)_____

Community Profile (continued)

Social Service Agencies (phone book, stated directory)_____

_____

Technology Use in the Community (chamber of commerce, community contacts)_____

_____

Recreation/Leisure Time (community contacts, various agencies)_____

_____

Other_____

_____

_____

Define Your Community (geography, role groups, interests)_____

_____

_____

Appendix G

Inventory of Community Capacity

Inventory of Community Capacity

Each community has a unique combination of assets upon which to build its future. An inventory or a "map" of the community resources needs to be developed.

The Inventory of Community Capacity provides the opportunity to record assets in seven categories: Individual, Organizational, Institutional, Physical, Federal and State, Cultural and Other. An in-depth description of each asset identified can provide an indication of what each has to offer.

It is important to view communities as a collection of assets and resources for educating children, rather than a collection of needs. This form can be used to record the local assets which could then be placed on a map to visually depict these resources.

Once this map has been established, it can be beneficial for two different purposes: to determine areas of opportunity and need, and to move to action once a need or goal is identified.

Individual Assets (who, what, etc.)

Name Skills, Talents, Experiences

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Organizational Assets

Newspaper

_____

_____

_____

Radio TV/Cable

_____

_____

_____

Utilities

_____

_____

_____

Citizen Groups

_____

_____

_____

Religious Organizations

Business Associations

Nonprofit Groups

Cooperatives

Home-based Enterprises

Small/Large Businesses

Institutional

Hospitals

Churches

Library

Police Department

Fire Department

College or University

School Facilities

Physical Assets

Lakes, Ponds

Vacant Land

Industrial Structures

Energy Resources

Water Resources

Parks/Recreation Areas

Natural Sites

Agriculture

Mining

Forests

Federal and State Assets

Extension Service/4-H

U.S. Forest Service

Bureau of Land Management

Small Business Administration

Agricultural Credit

Rural Development Agency

Telecommunications Agency

School Service Center

State Education Agency

Natural Resource Department

Economic Development Department

Local Development District

Military Facility

Cultural Assets

Historical/Art Groups

Ethnic and Racial diversity/Heritage

Crafts and Other Skills

Cultural Organizations

Other Assets

Appendix H

Windshield Survey

Windshield Survey

Directions:

This instrument can be used as a checklist as the team drives through the community. Notes can be taken of what is observed and this information combined with the Inventory of Community Capacity. Scanning the checklist will help focus on what is available within the community to aid in thinking of school and academic achievement and the relationship to the community and the land it lies on.

Things to consider in the community:

- ❑ Geography
- ❑ Transportation
- ❑ Local History
- ❑ People in the community
- ❑ Economic structure
- ❑ Employment
- ❑ Industrial Future
- ❑ Local Government Units
- ❑ Law enforcement
- ❑ Land use
- ❑ Housing conditions
- ❑ Neighborhoods
- ❑ Libraries/museums
- ❑ Private schools
- ❑ Higher Education
- ❑ Cultural facilities
- ❑ Number and type of churches
- ❑ Building and equipment
- ❑ Public assistance
- ❑ Service to strengthen families
- ❑ Hospitals
- ❑ Public health services
- ❑ Newspapers
- ❑ Radio and television
- ❑ Other media
- ❑ Social groups
- ❑ Association
- ❑ Community functions
- ❑ Public recreation

Appendix I

Indicators of Community Support for Academic Achievement

Indicators of Community Support for Academic Achievement

Directions

The Community Support for Academic Achievement Indicators worksheet has 16 indicators that can be rated on a low-to-high scale. To complete this exercise, take the following steps:

1. First, each team member should evaluate the community support for each item on a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 indicating low community support, and 10 indicating high community support.
2. Second, the group should discuss each question, and come to a consensus on the *group's* answer. This provides an opportunity to discuss each issue, and identify issues in need of attention.
3. Finally, the team should summarize its reasons for the group rating if it is lower than desired. If community support for an individual item is perceived as particularly low, the team may choose to address this item in their action plan.

1. Students have access to a high-quality curriculum.
Low 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High
Rating Justification:

2. Community leaders recognize the need for high academic achievement of students.
Low 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High
Rating Justification:

3. Community members assist students in academic achievement.
Low 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High
Rating Justification:

4. Civic organizations recognize students who excel in academic achievement.
Low 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High
Rating Justification:

5. The community is used as a learning laboratory for students.
Low 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High
Rating Justification:

6 Local media (TV, radio, the press) recognize the success of students achievements.
Low 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High
Rating Justification:

7. Community members value the academic achievement of all students.
Low 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High
Rating Justification:

8. School board policies encourage high standards in education.
Low 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High
Rating Justification:

9. Local community financial resources are sufficient and leveraged to support high-quality academic programs.
Low 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High
Rating Justification:

10. Data are collected and used in improving opportunities for students to achieve.
Low 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High
Rating Justification:

11. The community supports continuous professional development of teachers for increased academic achievement of students.
Low 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High
Rating Justification:

12. All students achieve acceptable levels of performance.
Low 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High
Rating Justification:

13. The school has an active community engagement team that is successful in improving student performance.
Low 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High
Rating Justification:

14. The community encourages teachers to seek recognition for teaching effectiveness.
Low 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High
Rating Justification:

15. Parents are well informed about their school's academic achievement program.
Low 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High
Rating Justification:

16. Teachers communicate with parents concerning the achievement level of their child/children by academic disciplines.
Low 0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 High
Rating Justification:

Appendix J

Action Plan Checklist
Action Plan Form
Action Plan Example Item

Action Plan Checklist

To implement the Action Plan to achieve the community engagement team's vision, the following steps must be taken

1. Set priorities for action based on indicator rating and community support potential.

2. Choose the top three areas in need of further attention by your school and community.

3. Identify resources, talents, and interests on the team that relate to the action areas selected.

4. Complete the Action Plan Worksheet to show the specific steps that will be taken to expand community engagement from the current rating (benchmark) to a desired rating level. *(See example Action Plan).*

Make sure your action plan has the following characteristics. Use this checklist to chart your progress:

_____ Our action plan identifies specific goals we expect to achieve through collaboration with individuals, agencies, or institutions in our community.

_____ Our action plan includes a schedule of essential tasks, actions, projects, or events that will lead to the results we have identified.

_____ Our action plan identifies who will have responsibility for doing what in order to complete each task, action, project, or event.

_____ Our action plan includes a budget to support and sustain our efforts and identifies other community resources we will visit, consult, or use in achieving our goals.

_____ Our action plan addresses school policy issues as well as programs and practices that improve learning in the core academic areas we have identified. Examples of policy issues include these:

- time for teacher professional development
- expanded course offerings for students
- equity in access and opportunity
- community involvement and participation
- incorporation of appropriate technology

Action Plan

Indicators and Related Activities	Current Priority Rating	Person(s)	Time Line	Expected Results/Impact

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123

Action Plan (example*)

Indicators and Related Activities	Current Priority Rating	Person(s) Responsible	Time Line	Expected Results/Impact
4. Civic organizations recognize students who excel in science.	2	Jim Brown Mary James Myra McVey Will Smith		
Activities				
a. Identify civic organizations in the community			a. May-June	a. List of civic organizations to approach and have as a resource
b. Identify leaders of organizations			b. May 1-10	b. Contact person identified and resource person for the future
c. Meet with leaders to discuss student recognition possibilities			c. May 1-10	c. Discuss ideas for recognizing students who excel in science, provide ideas if necessary, open roads for additional communication and cooperation
d. Set potential dates for recognition			d. May-June	d. Date for recognition

* One form can be used for each indicator, and more than one page can be used if necessary.